

BOGOMIL NONEV

A JOURNEY
THROUGH THE AGES



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PROLOGUE

A trail across the span of the centuries, or the traditions and stages which preceded the development of Old Bulgarian art

As we retrace our steps down the spiralling trails of history, we encounter at various turns traditions created in times immemorial, which gradually shaped the artistic values and a creative and spiritual maturity in the Bulgaria of today.

Fascinating discoveries broaden our field of vision all the time and fill gaps in our knowledge of what happened in the Bulgarian lands in remote and late antiquity, in the early and late Christian period, and in all stages of that creative spirit which gave a final touch to the Bulgarian spoken and written word, and to the songs and literary developments of the Bulgarian people.

A look back into the past helps us feel and understand how those who laid the foundations of the Bulgarian artistic and literary culture used the heritage of the traditions left them by the ancients. This heritage brought forth further results, particularly in the impressive and versatile forms of the plastic arts. It stimulated the development of the Bulgarian people in the ninth century, when the Cyrillic script was created.

At Karanovo, in Silistra District, archeologists have unearthed four cultural horizons dating back to the pre-historic period. The site is twelve metres deep and the first, second and third horizons are undoubtedly Neolithic. The top stratum, in the opinion of the Bulgarian archeologist Georgi I. Georgiev, marks the transition to the Chalcolith, with several horizons of later periods: Karanovo- V (or Proto-Maritsa), Karanovo- VI and Karanovo- VII.

Even though at a much later date continuity seems to be lacking, and we cannot enumerate seven Bulgarian kings of one and the same dynasty, the cultural development of the people in our territory forms an unbroken line, a dynasty through several

millennia. We see the evolvement of artistic forms, of a sense of shape and colour, and of the urge to perpetuate the image of man and his environment. To these Karanovo cultural 'dynasties' belonged the fine pottery cult altars, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines. These distant epochs witnessed the birth of architectural conceptions and a decorative style for the home, introducing elements of beauty to everyday life.



But let us take a step further back.

A few years ago archeologists dug up what is now known as the Azmashka Mogila settlement mound near Stara Zagora, in Southern Bulgaria, covering an area of one and a half acres. The settlement was founded several thousand years BC. During earth-moving operations on the site of the present Nitrogen Fertilizer Plant powerful excavators bit into several layers which contained evidence of a former culture.

Iron has often been the instrument of cultural devastation and the destruction of human life. But in our day and age iron has become the most dedicated of archeologists, digging deep into the bowels of the earth, reviving memories of the distant past, giving a sense of present values and helping us get our bearings for the future.

The collection at the Stara Zagora Museum has numerous finds dating back to thousands of years B.C. Azmashka Mogila is a coeval of Karanovo and shows that this old civilization spread over a far larger area in Bulgaria than originally thought.

Experts speak of an 'Azmashka variant of Karanovo-I'. Here the first cultural horizon is three metres thick and much richer.

Our expert on the Pre-historic period, G.I. Georgiev, believes that the Neolithic culture at Karanovo-I developed over a very long period, which was paralleled by the five horizons of human habitations at Azmashka Mogila showing them to have been the accumulations not of centuries, but of thousands of years.

A subsequent discovery of a Neolithic settlement near Kazanluk has provided additional data to assume that the civilizations which developed in our territory were just as old as those known to have existed in many Middle East and Mediterranean areas; although not isolated from the other parts of the ancient world, it was, nevertheless, an autochthonic civilization. Naturally, it would also be interesting to establish the influence of other countries, both far and near, on art and culture. Finds in the territory of Bulgaria have included pottery, sculptural works, agricultural implements, pretty shells and ornaments of stone and bone. They are shells of clams which are still common in the Mediterranean Sea and were evidently brought from there in the old days for purely ornamental purposes.

We must also bear in mind the finds at Mouldava, near Assenovgrad, in Southern Bulgaria. The northern slopes of the Rhodope Mountains were populated in the sixth and fifth millennia B.C., and objects of art have been found at Kurdjali, Rakitovo and Dorkovo. Earth-moving operations during the building of Chatalka Dam near Stara Zagora unearthed settlements and necropoli from the early Neolithic Age and the Karanovo-I group. The finds included pottery with graphite ornamentation; figurines of clay, bone and marble; a remarkable statuette of a woman with a child on her back suggesting a metaphoric composition; a small item, and a 'Maternité' of a kind which appeared in infinite varieties in European art in the course of the centuries.

Dipsizka Mogila, another settlement mound near Stara Zagora, furnishes additional proof that we are not merely the

heirs of antiquity, but also of much older pre-historic and autochthonic civilizations which may well have had an impact on the development of other nations further south. Here the cultural horizons are ten metres thick, whereas the cultural horizons of settlement mounds at Vinitsa near Shoumen, at Golyamo Delchevo near Varna and at Ovcharovo near Turgovishte are nearly five metres thick. In this last mound archeologists have discovered fourteen building levels, the model of a house, idols and figurines used in cult rituals.



While archeologists have made their own probes, many discoveries have been accidental, resulting from the extensive scale of construction in post-war Bulgaria. Excavators have unearthed near Vratsa, in western Bulgaria, and at Devnya, near the Black Sea coast, remains of a civilization which flourished five or four thousand years BC. This civilization belonged to a society that had the beginnings of social inequality and the unequal division of property: a division into rulers and 'populus', those who had the sceptre of power, the high priests and augurs, on the one side, and the ordinary working people, on the other. In the necropoli we find both ordinary graves, and the symbolic burials of those who went to sea or travelled afar and never returned.

Other settlements have been discovered in Kremikovtsi and

near Chavdar, Sofia District, and near Tlachene and Gradeshnitsa in the Vratsa area. There were thriving settlements all over the country, which had reached a high level of cultural and artistic development.

The Gradeshnitsa site was discovered in 1965 and diggings started a few years ago. Like the Karanovo, Azmashka Mogila and Kremikovtsi sites, there are several building levels. The present finds include habitations, working tools and remarkable works of art.

Some experts classify ancient pottery as vessels for the homes of ordinary people, and fine ceramic works to decorate the homes of the higher classes of society. The Bulgarian archeologist Bogdan Nikolov thinks the Gradeshnitsa pottery to be of the kind used by the common people, in spite of its remarkable design and ornamentation. The vessels are coarse-surfaced or polished, monochrome or polychrome, mostly in grey-black, wine-red or light brown colours. The ornamentation is in white or black colours on a red background, in straight intertwining or undulating lines, meandering motifs or volutes. We see inventive geometric stylizations, seeming to analyse man's environment and generalize it in signs and symbols. We find symmetry and asymmetry, anthropomorphic vessels and plastic designs suggesting a strict stylization of some functional object. This is a glimpse into an ancient world of people living two thousand years BC who were able to express their creative emotions with astonishing artistry at Levels A, B and C – as modern scientists categorize the developments of the various cultural horizons.

The study of the settlement mounds in the territory of Bulgaria and the numerous finds show them to be very, very old forms of real art. This is of the utmost importance, as they give us the aesthetic and philosophical insight which helps us decipher from the plastic language of the past the genetic sources of the emotionality, media of expression and outlook of the ancient inhabitants of our land.

Platters, fruit-bowls mounted on four legs, vases in the form of a human head or a northern reindeer, versatile ornamental patterns and plastic geometrical forms, tall or oval tumblers and a harmony of colours – these are all qualities which were not for-



mulated by any set of aesthetic rules or experts. In them we discern a certain system of aesthetic trends, which gradually shaped traditions and aesthetic responses to the ideals of beauty.

In the bottom of a rectangular clay vessel found near the village of Gradeshnitsa we see the figure of an adorant and 24 symbols on the four sides. They do not necessarily suggest some alphabetic system, but they are interesting specimens of the graphic and decorative art of our ancient past.

From a later period we have an inscription at the village of Kyolmen, and Thracian inscriptions on a gold ring found near Duvanli, on another ring found near Ezerovo, and on a silver bowl from Alexandrovo – epigraphic relics from the days of the early Thracians.

We do not know whether there was a Thracian script, although it has been said that the Scriptures were translated into the language of the Bessi tribe in the 5th century A.D.

There is no Thracian literature, but only legends about famous songsters and poets.

But we have found fine versatile specimens of the Thracian plastic arts. They are symbolic of the creative imagination of tribes of differing ethnic origins, of the mythology of nations far and near, of legends of the heroic epos of the times, of gods and deities and, above all, of one god who was venerated in all areas of the ancient world, and whose cult was disowned by emperors and persecuted by the prelates of Christianity: Dionysus.



It is difficult to define the turns in the spiral demarcating the transitional phases in the development of art in the Bulgaria of today. More data has to be found and analysed, and epochs should be broken down into periods, bearing in mind that even in such cases these periods would hardly be completely pure, for they are bound to have traces of the past, and traces coming from the north or south.

It is only in recent years that experts have discovered remarkable works of art from the mid or late Neolithic Age. Our imagination is stirred by the realization that we have at the back of us the quest and plastic expression of beauty of some seven hundred generations.

There are no great gaps or unknowns in the historic period of human society. Man's thought followed a cumulative trend of development from one generation and one epoch to another, constantly broadening its horizons which paved the way for our present achievements. So we know it to have been in the sixth, fifth and fourth millennia BC, down to the present day.

Thrace felt the influence of civilizations in the south and north, east and west, while trying to assert its own media of expression. This is just as true of our present socialist culture.



because no matter how instructive the traditions of the past, our creative urge cannot be confined to repeated schemes and models; there is always bound to be a specific pattern, form or colour typifying the national, social or class trait of a people at a certain stage of their development.

In the second millennium BC the Mediterranean world, and particularly the Balkan Peninsula, were the crossroads of ethnic migrations, incursions and devastating wars, which resulted in new ethnic communities.

Weaponry was needed in an area of frequent warfare and rich hunting grounds. In this early period the Thracians mined iron ore, cast metal and forged broadswords, arrow and javelin



heads. Thracian weapons have been found near the village of Omarchevo, in Sliven District, near Topchii, Razgrad District, and elsewhere. The archaeologist M.Chichikova believes them to be of the same period as the weapons found at the market place (Agora) at Kerameikos, in Athens, and to be older than the swords found in Italy.

During the Iron and Early Bronze Ages pottery was both a product of the artisan crafts and a work of art. The surfaces of vessels were smoothly polished and prepared for elaborate multi-coloured ornamentation. The decorative patterns made frequent use of circles, undulating lines, incisions and S-shaped spirals.

Pottery and toreutic art developed side by side with a reciprocal influence.

Gradually geometrical and abstract patterns were replaced by animal motifs and other elements borrowed from what the artists saw in real life. The geometrical style gradually formed the stylized background of elements borrowed from life. The design was simple but conveyed a strong emotional impact and expressed effective dramatic contrasts.

The analogies observed in the study of the 'Halstatt', of the Thracian Bronze and Iron Ages are illustrative.



We find that the cultural interaction between the Thracians and their neighbouring countries along with their aesthetic autochthony created emotional and moral values which characterized the development of Thracian art as a whole, with clearly defined local trends. The versatile forms of Thracian art marked another step forward in the development of the artist as an individual with a very personal touch and vision. Works of art from the epoch of the first find in the Thracian language at Kyolmen, Shoumen District, are no longer imitative; their originality shows them to have been created by persons with a very individual style and outlook.

It is generally agreed that in the first millennium BC. and perhaps earlier, the institution of king and high-priest was well established with the Thracians. Later, the dynasties of the

Odrissae, Astaeans and Sapaean ruled the land. A similar individualization existed in the development of art. Here too, there were fairly clear territorial and historical demarcations between a number of 'artistic dynasties'. They have not been listed, but we find specific trends in the field of art which were evidently the result of specific creative personalities.

The administration of the Thracians, their mythology, social relations, the impact of historical realities and the development of

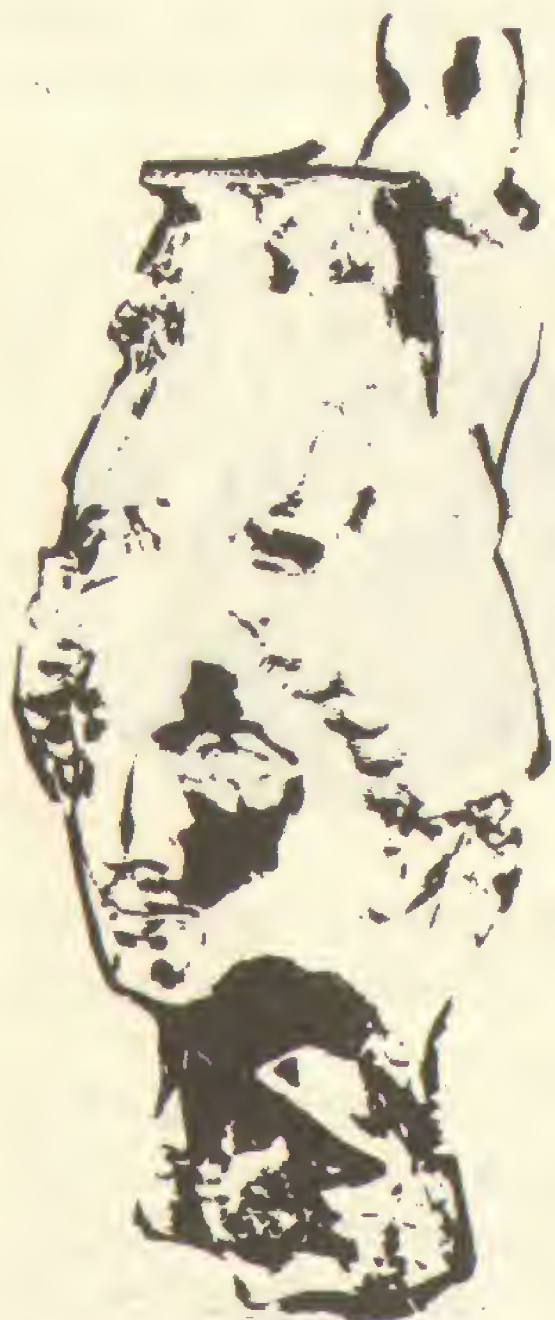


art had much in common with these phenomena in other countries of the ancient world. But in each case there was a certain streak of originality.

Along the Black Sea coast there were many city-states of the Hellenic type, fortified settlements and marketing centres. Cape Kaliakra was the site of the fortified Thracian city of Thyrsis. Farther south Messembria gradually grew into a thriving city-state. Certain authors of the older generation wonder why some Thracian cities lacked large public buildings, a theatre, Agora, or an aqueduct. We must remember that they were rather small settlements in which streets, squares, shrines with protective walls and pentagonal or hexagonal towers, were gradually built in a process of topographical continuity.

It is true that Seuthopolis (capital of the Thracian ruler Seuthes III) was smaller than Messembria, but the archeologist L.Ognenova-Marinova notes that the necropolis at Seuthopolis and the burial mounds near the village of Yankovo, Shoumen District, contain the most highly developed forms of beehive tombs, remindful of the architectural style of Mycenae.

The famous Kazanluk tomb was at first thought to be a rare but isolated masterpiece of Thracian art. Other tombs with beautiful wall paintings have been subsequently discovered at Rouen, Bourgas District, at Voivodovo near Haskovo, at Krun and Muglish near Kazanluk and at Kaloyanovo, near Sliven. Fine specimens of decorative art have also been discovered in



Thracian houses unearthed at Seuthopolis and Messembria. It is true that only the Kazanluk tomb is in a perfect state of preservation and that no other can rival it as a work of art. But even at Pompei the Villa of the Mysteries stands unique.

It is important to note that we have accumulated sufficient data to prove the existence of a typically Thracian trend in ancient Greek decorative art towards the end of the 4th century BC. (L. Ognenova-Marinova).

The term 'decorative art' is used conditionally, because the finds in Bulgaria, and particularly the paintings in the Kazanluk tomb, rival the sepulchral decorative art of the Etruscans and of

that at Pompei, the Mosaic panels of Pella in Macedonia and the Roman mosaics in Sicily and North Africa. While they were supposed to be functional, their beauty places them in the class of the fine arts at their very best.

Bulgarian archeologists note the influence of Iranian and Achaemenian art. While this may undoubtedly be true, far more



important is the community of Thracian art with the cradle of art, human relations, philosophy, mythology and aesthetic standards of the Mediterranean civilizations.

It is now possible to demarcate the content of concrete periods in the political history of the Thracians (this Alexander Fol, Bulgarian historian, did recently). We believe that we can mark the stages or thresholds of their aesthetic development: the history of Thracian art through its Halstatt period, through its geometrical style to the period of Hellenism and that of Roman art. While these are the surface marks of the historical and artistic development of the Thracians, we should consider the

motivation defining the stages of the Thracian system of plastic arts.

Many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of ancient history have been fitted together by the joint efforts of archeologists, historians, epigraphic, numismatic and heraldic experts. The history of art gives us an astonishingly clearer picture of the material and



spiritual life, and of the ages in which emotional and philosophical maturity of the ancients developed.

We mentioned the enormous historical, ethnic and aesthetic interaction between the Thracians and many other countries of the ancient world. This trend did not cease with the destruction of the largest and longest lasting Thracian state – that of the Odrissae, just as it had started long before its foundation. In fact, these relations became even more dynamic within the confines of the Roman Empire, which was a conglomeration of many different ethnic communities, speaking different languages, venerating their favourite patron gods, using and developing their own media or artistic expression, and preserving their way of life, customs and traditions. This was a period in which distinct 'provincial cultures' gradually developed, the impact of some of which was stronger than that of the art created in the Eternal City. The phenomenon was noted by Engels.



The early Byzantine and early medieval Bulgarian cultures inherited many elements from antiquity. This heritage on the territory of Bulgaria is still being investigated because it was a source of creative vitality and imaginative exploration. Looking back, we see stormy seas swaying the political and cultural ship of state. Later adverse currents joined the main stream of quiet waters and flowed gently across the thresholds towards new artistic horizons.

In Roman times cities were built according to plan. In Bulgaria cities like Philippopolis, Marcianopolis, Augusta Trajana, Odessos, Pautalia, Oescus and Nove occupied an area of thirty to seventy hectares. All had fortress walls with rectangular or round towers and S-shaped battlements. Inside, two main thoroughfares – *Cardo Maximus* and *Decumanus Maximus* – intersected at a forum. There were numerous parallel streets and passages off the main streets. The cities had solid aqueducts and sewage disposal systems; their baths and the homes of the

rich had heating systems under the floor. These architectural elements are indicative of the aesthetic, civil engineering and functional continuity existing in the days of the Thracians. Each city had a central square flanked by public buildings.

Here is another aspect of this continuity.



At a site in Plovdiv, archeologists have discovered the ruins of a large two-storeyed house with an inscription showing it to have been the local Koinobulion – the building of the Thracian Council. While the basic duty of this Council was to nurse the cult of the Roman Emperor, the fact that it existed as a council of the Thracian elders shows the recognition of a specific ethnic community within the multi-national Roman Empire.

The urban planning traditions inherited from the Romans together with the skill of their architects and builders influenced the construction style and methods of the Bulgarians in the Middle Ages when they started building their large urban centres

with basilicas, amphitheatres, stadiums, market places with large sun dials, stylish baths, grain silos, shrines, temples and various other buildings for cult rituals.

Votive monuments were very popular, particularly those with the effigy of the heroic Thracian Horseman. This patron god appeared later during the period of Christianity in the form of St. George and the Dragon, St. Demetrius and the epic champion of the oppressed Christians in the Balkans during the days of Ottoman rule. Here, too, are all the elements of unbroken tradition.

Naturally, the Old Bulgars felt no sympathy for all Roman customs and traditions. They had a different mentality and disposition, different tastes and preferences. They lost the taste for



shows and gladiatorial combats and even for the theatre and mime, because their new state had to solve vital problems of organization, religion, peace and frontier security. Functional architecture and scholastic work became a matter of prime concern.

Nevertheless, tradition runs like a red thread through the various periods of historical development. A thread that seems to disappear at times, only to surface again and continue the customs and traditions of antiquity.



In a monograph the Bulgarian archeologist Teofil Ivanov gives another example of the intricate maze of sources which have shaped our vital traditions.

On the site of the Roman town of Oescus, archeologists have discovered a temple to Fortuna, the fickle goddess in which emperors and ordinary warriors placed their trust. It was built during the reign of Emperor Commodus, some time between the years 184 and 192. From an inscription on the frieze between the architrave and the cornice we learn that it was erected by wealthy citizens. We are given data regarding the decoration of the temple and the history of Lower Moesia. The archeologist T. Ivanov says that the temple fell in ruins through neglect and ceased to be used towards the end of the 4th century and that in the 12th century a Bulgarian domed church with a nave and apse was built on the site of the ruins. An inscription on a slab in the northern wall of the church mentioned the Bogomil heretics.

Finds in Bulgaria include Roman replicas of famous works of the ancient Greek masters: a marble head of Heracles found

in Sofia (copy of a statue by Scopas); a marble statue of the recumbent Heracles (copy of a statue by Lyssipos), found at Ratiaria, and others show the development of art through the ancient Greek and Roman periods. Toreutics and ceramics were followed by sculpture and new forms of monumental art. The first sarcophagi appeared; they were brought from Attica and



Asia Minor and were then produced locally. The Thracian Horseman was one of their traditional decorative and philosophical elements - a metaphor of manly courage, of hope and faith in the future.

The versatile forms of the plastic arts flourished in the territories of Bulgaria, including elaborate ornaments for chariots, harnesses and horse bridles, fibulas, gems, cameos and other masterpieces of the decorative arts. Sculpture blazed the trail for the development of art during the Roman period, centering on the representation of human thought and emotion, on the psychology and beauty of the human face and figure. The dead were accompanied on their journey to the world beyond by effigies of the Thracian Horseman - an object in which we can follow the development of art from the ancient Greeks, through

the Roman period and the beginning of Old Thracian art, imbued with great imagination and purposeful thought.

We have seen the main stages in the development of art in the lands of present-day Bulgaria. Prehistoric art was forgotten.



Antiquity gradually fused with the Middle Ages. Paganism and polytheism made way for the united symbols of the Christian faith. We come to an entirely new period in the development of art and artistic values, when the past is nevertheless still interwoven with the present, because the precepts and negations of theology can never damp the forceful impact of true art.

CHAPTER I

The revival of art in the Bulgarian lands and the creative urge which shaped the trends of Bulgarian cultural development

This was the period of late ancient or early Christian art. The old basilica changed in style as it became a Christian shrine for the worship of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Shepherd and the lamb, birds and trees of paradise make us look back to our prehistoric Garden of Eden, purged from sin and temptation and keeping us constantly aware of the sufferings we must endure to cross again the threshold of the realm of bliss eternal.

God is God on High, but he had to be worshipped by the earthly form of art. Decorative elements of monumental proportions made their appearance, together with fine mosaic work and with multicoloured, though still monothematic, art. Some sculpture was embellished with floral and animal motifs and even human images.

The architectural style of the church took on a definite shape and developed through the ages. N.Mavrodinov, the eminent historian of Bulgarian art, traced the beginnings of the basilica to the 4th and 5th centuries and the building of scores of religious shrines in the districts of Varna, Tolbukhin, Sofia and Pazardjik, and the Church of St Sophia in the old Thracian town of Serdica (present-day Sofia). Olympic mythology made way for the Christian world of the Apostles and miracle-working Holy Martyrs – a motley mixture of the Old and the New, an austere and ascetic world view, the glorification of suffering and self-torment, and of The Word, for the glory of the Almighty. This morality was reincarnated in a symbol, or a system of symbolic creeds which gradually imposed themselves in life as mandatory moral categories. Art was relegated to a subordinate role and made a servant of the Church. Tall cupolas, sombre arches and the



echoes of incantations reverberating among venerated icons, gilt altars and biblical mural compositions struck in the hearts of the faithful the feeling of the fear of God and submission to the precepts of the patriarchs.

In her book 'Thracian Art in the Bulgarian Lands', Prof. Mara Tsoncheva notes that in this early period the pagan Thracian Horseman (not yet sanctified by Christianity) continued to reign supreme in the cults of the people. A tombstone at the necropolis of Serdica was dedicated to Marcus Aurelius Teres. On it are both the effigy of the dead emperor and of the Horseman-Heros. This is a mixture of Roman sculpture and a Thracian variation on a classical theme: the name of a Roman emperor crushed by the grief of resignation to his fate and a common Thracian deity thrown together. We gradually come to a popular belief in the reign and power of Angels and Archangels with hollow cheeks and probing, mystic eyes; of Warrior and Guardian Saints.

Constantine the Great built Constantinople in 330 on the site of a humble settlement. But this does not mean that the area in which the Byzantine Empire grew and flourished had not had a thriving civilization, with its own cultural and spiritual traditions and the concept of sovereign statesmanship. While the Western Empire lived for only six centuries, the Eastern Empire lived a

thousand years longer. Its culture and philosophy were closer to the cultural sources of antiquity and felt the marked impact of the East.

Towards the end of his life Emperor Theodossius divided the Roman Empire (in 395).

We shall now cease to occupy ourselves with Rome, for it was eclipsed by CONSTANTINOPLE in every way. In the course of the centuries Byzantium developed its own very individual style, imbued both with ancient sensualism and with the primitive, expressionistic tendencies of the East.

Byzantine art was suggestive; it set guidelines for human behaviour; it preached and imposed faith and humility and the unity between Church and State. At the same time, it condoned the worldly glitter of the court, the bawdy life of the aristocratic nobility and the immense wealth amassed by the clergy. The state exercised strict control over all aspects of spiritual and cultural life and this explains why the esthetic thinkers were court notables and famous hierarchs of the church. In the 9th century Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, gained fame as one of the most enlightened philosophers of his time. We shall have more to say about him when discussing Bulgarian history during the reign of Tsar Simeon I.

‘Do not think (said Photius) that I believe the art and power of oratory to consist of loquacious pomp, which mars the pristine beauty of the word by a glittering coat of paint, keeping it barren and dry. Nor does it consist of assuming frowning postures and forgetting all about the sunny impact of a smile; or evading all that is to the point and plunging everything into foggy vagueness. The art of oratory does not mean sowing confusion or striking awesome fear into the hearts of the simple. This is not the work of Wisdom! Neither is it a trick of giving ourselves a shine to draw blind admiration...

‘No! Oratory is the champion of chastity. It is our teacher and basic pedagogue, wielding the power of conviction; using familiar terms to reveal the essence of things and, if these things need be explained, to draw the curtain and reveal the Truth.’

However, the curtain of darkness continued to cloak the Truth. Step by step, by comparing familiar notions, man groped to find his way through the hazy labyrinth.

Iconography was a refined and venerated art bearing the mark of its ancient heritage and much of the boredom of emperors, whose existence was weighed down by the pleasures of life and by their lusty and scheming wives and lovers. And so, even when coarse pub-owners in Constantinople became emperors, the grip of established esthetic norms kept them within the ruts of tradition. The intricate symbolism of the Church defined everything with the strictest precision: the image of the



terrestrial globe, the realm of pure Christian and Apostolic philosophy, the shape of the throne of the Lord on High, the stars, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit.

If emperors were to retain their power on earth, they found it expedient to honour the colourful pageantry of the Power of Heaven. This Power disciplined and trained the spirit and guided it along the slippery passages of court intrigue. The God-Logos was all-knowing and a source of contemplative inspiration. In the realm of mystic thought, man reached the threshold beyond which his eyes beheld the Divine Truth...

But now let us depart from this world of frankincense and myrrh and go back to the Bulgarian lands that were being invaded and raided by horsemen who devastated cities and destroyed countless numbers of people in the course of their migrations.

By and by the changing way of life and economic conditions consolidated the spiritual and creative traditions which have shaped the Bulgarians of today.

A brief look at events in the Balkan Peninsula at this period would be instructive.

By the end of the 7th century migrating Slavs had settled permanently south of the Danube in Lower Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly, Central Greece and as far down as the Peloponnesus, and the island of Crete. Toponymic studies show the trails of their migration. A Byzantine writer noted 'the whole of Hellas has been slavified and turned barbarian!'

The SLAVS were an old European people living in the territories along the Pripyet River and later migrating eastward towards the banks of the Danube and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. Their cultural level did not rival that of Byzantium, but it was, nevertheless, well on its way to creative development. This was particularly apparent in the potters' art.

The second main element were the BULGARS, migrating from the East – a tribe of Sarmat-Turkic origin. Their Khan, Asparuch, occupied the lands inhabited by Slavs under Byzantine rule and in 681 founded the first Bulgarian state. The gradual assimilation of Slavs, Bulgars and indigenous Thracians shaped the ethnic identity of a Bulgarian people in the Balkan Peninsula.

When the Bulgars lived along the Don River, around the shores of the Sea of Azov and in the northern Caucasus for three centuries, before moving towards the Balkans, they had well established cultural traditions and close contacts with the ancient civilizations of Hither Asia, Rome and Byzantium. After settling in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula they developed their traditions in the applied and monumental arts – mainly architecture and sculpture. The Bulgar tribal aristocracy fought fierce battles with the Byzantine armies, conquered new territories and consolidated the rule of the first Bulgarian state. The style of art which gradually evolved was based on the traditions of the local Thracians and Slavs and elements which the Bulgars brought from the East.

The interaction between these three groups accelerated the development of the monumental arts and the creation of the Slavonic script, which soon bore rich literary and cultural fruit. In the course of several centuries cultural progress led to major developments in every sphere of life, which we generally call the Renaissance period.

Marx and Engels have noted that the medieval period should in no case be called a 'dark' age. The approaches to the process of intellectual, esthetic and ethic evolution which paved the way for the Renaissance varied considerably. They were not necessarily linked with the revival of the culture of antiquity because certain nations with no memory of the ancient world also felt the spur of progress. Other nations, with only vague memories of the past, have made contributions to the remarkable process of social revival, which should not be underrated.

The Renaissance was not a strictly European, Mediterranean or Italic phenomenon, regardless of where it bore the richest fruit and created genii and remarkable works of art.

The territory of the Renaissance was wide and heterogeneous and certain areas reached a much higher stage of development more quickly than others. But the impact was enormous, universal, and in any case Eurasian. We have no right to overlook the East and the Byzantine Empire in particular, without whose multi-stage cultural developments in the course of centuries the 'Italian model' would hardly have been evolved. This has been made clear by the eminent historian of Byzantine art, V.I. Lazarev. The appreciation of the wide and distant territorial impact of the Renaissance is shared by other eminent experts on the cultural history of the world, like Conrad, Likhachov, Chaloyan...

From the 5th to the 15th centuries Byzantium was the leading cultural centre in Europe, with the highest level of material prosperity. The cultural heritage of antiquity and of the East shaped new conceptions in architecture, enriched the form of the basilica and the interior decorators' art. Esthetic taste predominated over the vain glitter of the past and resulted in such impressive creations as the Church of St Sophia or the mosaics at Ravenna.

The ninth century in Byzantine history is known as the Early or First Renaissance. Lay problems appeared in the writings of scholars. The works of the old philosophers set new guidelines of thought; those of the old poets and geographers were copied, narrated and told in books, lectures or chronicles. Biographies dealt with topical problems of the period. This concentrating on the problems of man, of poverty and slavery, is typical of the

Early Renaissance, and involved the humanization of philosophy, the clarification of social outlook and the interpretation of man's fate and his way of life.

Charles Diehl has noted that the First Byzantine Renaissance may be discovered in the Golden Age of Justinian's reign.



The economic and cultural evolution in the 6th and 7th centuries did much to pave the way for the creation and development of the Slavonic script, literature and of art and culture in the first Bulgarian state.

Diehl marks several other stages in the Byzantine Renaissance, which bring us to the threshold of Bulgaria's cultural development. These are Justinian's Golden Age, the Renaissance during the reign of the Isaurian dynasty, a second Renaissance under the Macedonian dynasty and, finally, a flourishing period from 1258 to 1453 during the reigns of the Paleologues. This delineation may be argued, as the stages of

economic and social development in the heterogeneous Byzantine Empire are not so clearly defined. The above-mentioned stages were often accompanied by foreign incursions and internal social upheavals. But, to a certain extent, they did exist. The important thing is that Byzantium played a very important role in the development of human civilization and this impact was felt on our own cultural development.

We think of the ninth century as the Golden Age of the cultural and material prosperity of the first Bulgarian state – the Early Bulgarian Renaissance and a period of outstanding statesmanship, builders, sculptors and artists. This was a historical reality in a country which at that time had one of the largest territories and population in Europe.

The revival of the humanistic and philosophical traditions of antiquity went parallel with the birth of a new ethnic community whose impact was felt on the development of the arts, scholastic thought and cultural growth. This was a creative continuity over the course of many centuries, with many ups and downs in the trends of cultural development, often attenuated but never stagnant, with a potential fertility which ultimately gave birth to the new.

One feels the influence of the cultural heritage of the past like an unbroken thread on the development of creative thought in the Bulgarian lands through periods of misfortune and untold devastations, to rise again out of the ashes and give birth to progress.

What are the facts?

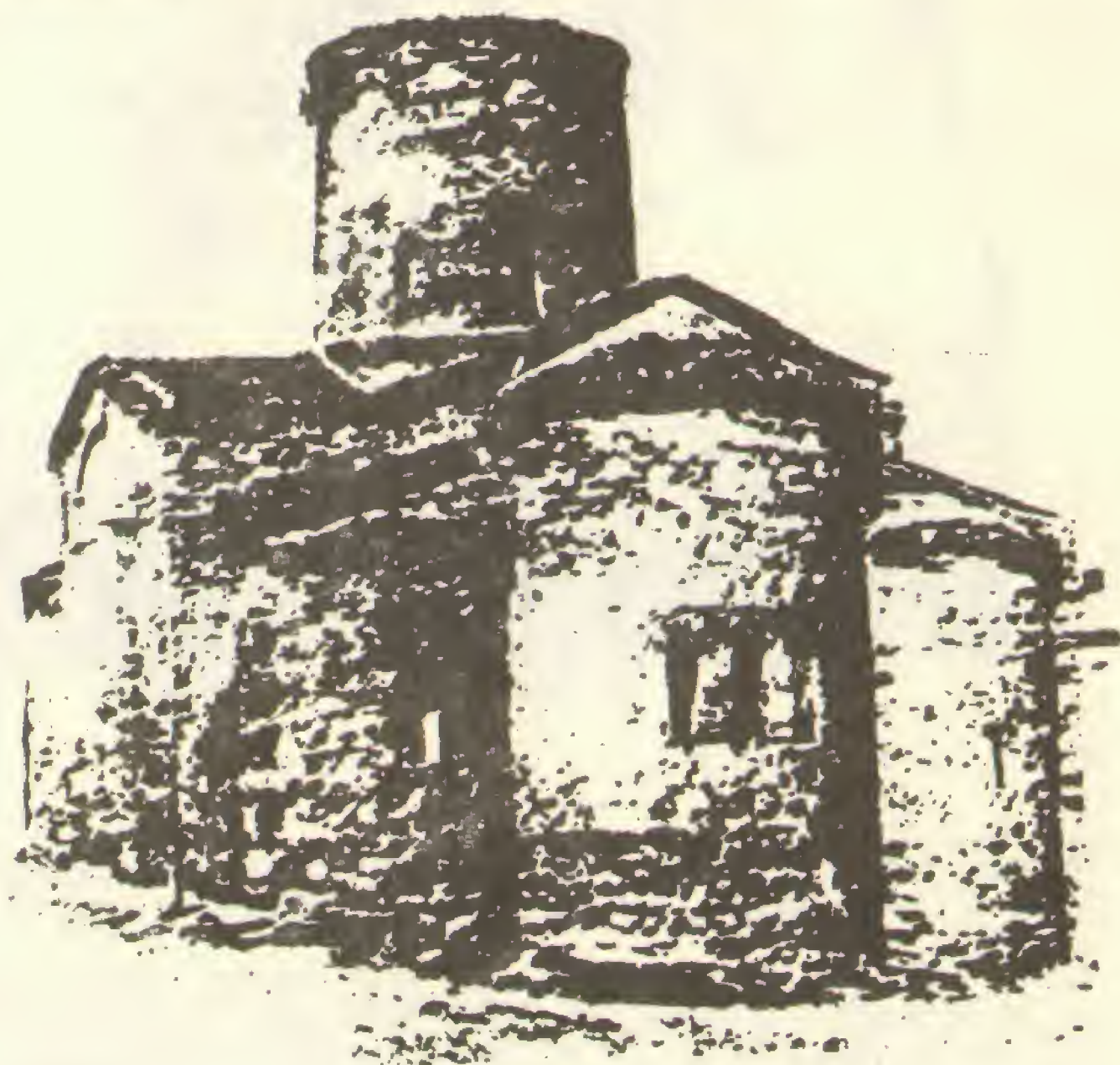
In his *History of the Bulgarian State*, the late Professor Vassil Zlatarski marks the migration of the Slavs to the Balkan Peninsula, followed by the arrival of the Bulgars from the northeast and the foundation of a Bulgarian state. This period shaped the historical and cultural identity of the new Slav-Bulgarian type.

However, Professor Zlatarski did not include in the formation of this type the ethnic and cultural heritage of the Thracians, who for a long time were an alloy of interrelated peoples on the crossroads of many nations and civilizations.

Modern historians note three main elements of the Bulgarian ethnic group: the indigenous population of Thracians with some Illyrian and other tribes; the Slavs, who gradually

assimilated the local population and, finally the Bulgars, who founded a Slav-Bulgarian state (Professor D. Angelov).

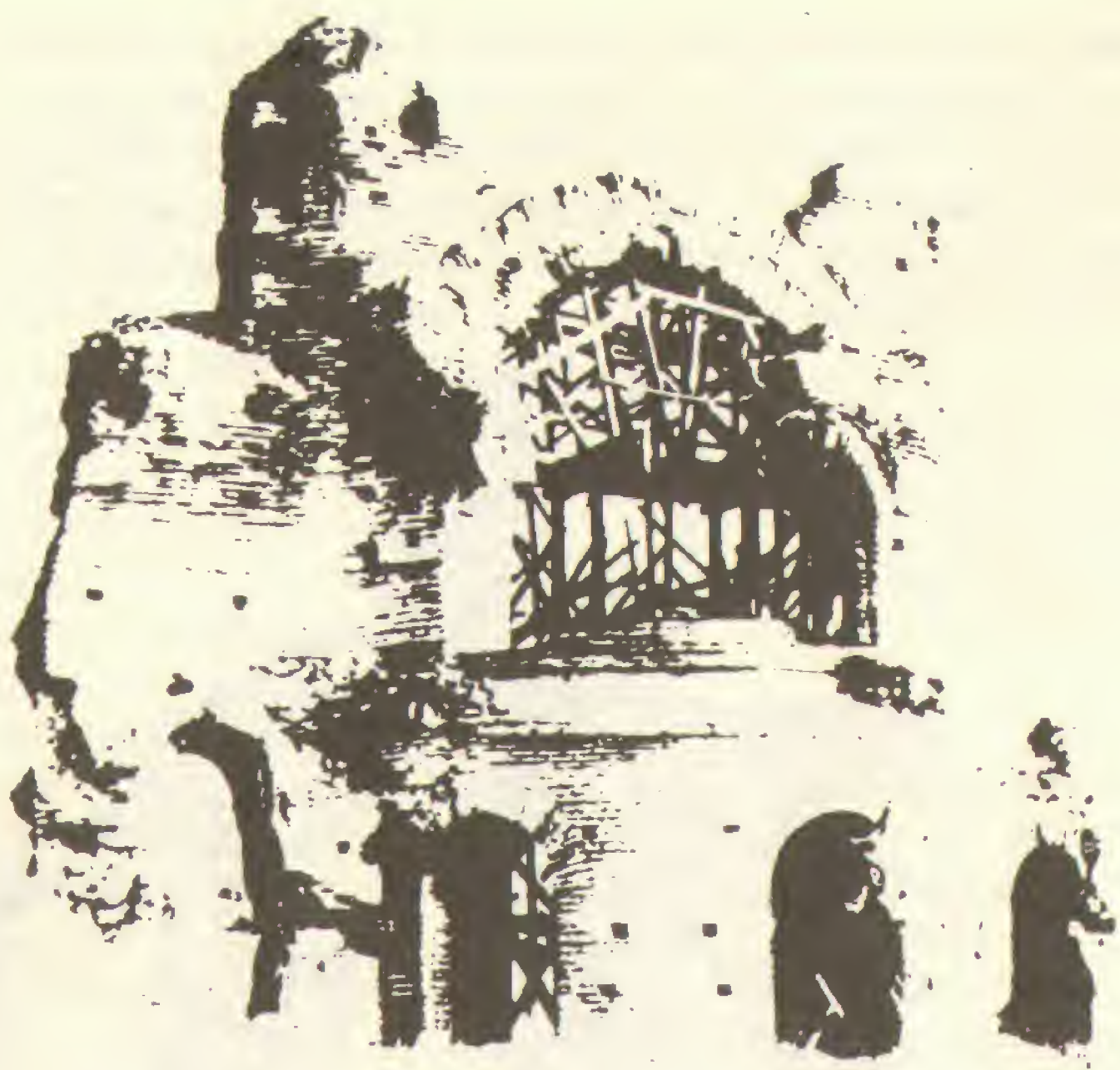
While Professor Zlatarski has not given a complete picture of the intricate ethnic fusion, he nevertheless drew attention to the complex interaction between the great mass of Slavs and the far less numerous migrants. He wrote:



'The relations existing between the two groups were not relations between victors and vanquished. The central position which the Bulgarians occupied territorially among the Slavonic tribes and their dominating role suggest that the Slavs became allies of the Bulgarians on the basis of some sort of federative relations for the purpose of preserving their independence. It is assumed that in this initial period the two peoples had separate administrative systems and that they lived apart.'

But this state of affairs did not last long. The Bulgarian rulers had a clear awareness that an accelerated fusion was imperative.

Professor V. Beshevliev and other scholars group the inscriptions preserved from the first Bulgarian state into chronicles, vic-



tory columns with the names of captured fortresses and battles won, peace treaties, frontier posts, inscriptions on buildings and tombstones.

I have often visited the old Church of the Forty Holy Martyrs in Turnovo. The massive 8th-century Omourtag Column rises like a pillar of Time Eternal in an interplay of light and shadow. Its inscription is an illuminating chronicle of the period:

'I, Khan Omourtag, living in my old home, built a resplendent residence on the Danube and, after measuring the distance between the two royal homes, built midway a hillock. From the centre of the hillock to my old palace there are 20,000 spreads of the arm (a measure of about 1,5 metres) and 20,000 more to the Danube. The said hillock is a glorious landmark, which I set after measuring the land. No matter how well a man may live, he is bound to die and another will take his place. May those who come after us look at this inscription and remember him who made it. The name of the ruler is Omourtag, Khan, and may God honour him to live a hundred years.'

This is the best-known of nearly seventy Old Bulgar inscriptions written in Greek letters. I like to read such inscriptions because they are a source of the wisdom of life and death, of the past and future. The Omourtag inscription was left by the Bulgars, whom Byzantine chroniclers usually called 'barbarians'. But these archives chiselled in stone are a rarity in the history of the European nations. These so-called barbarians built a mighty state, splendid cities and created their own system of laws and

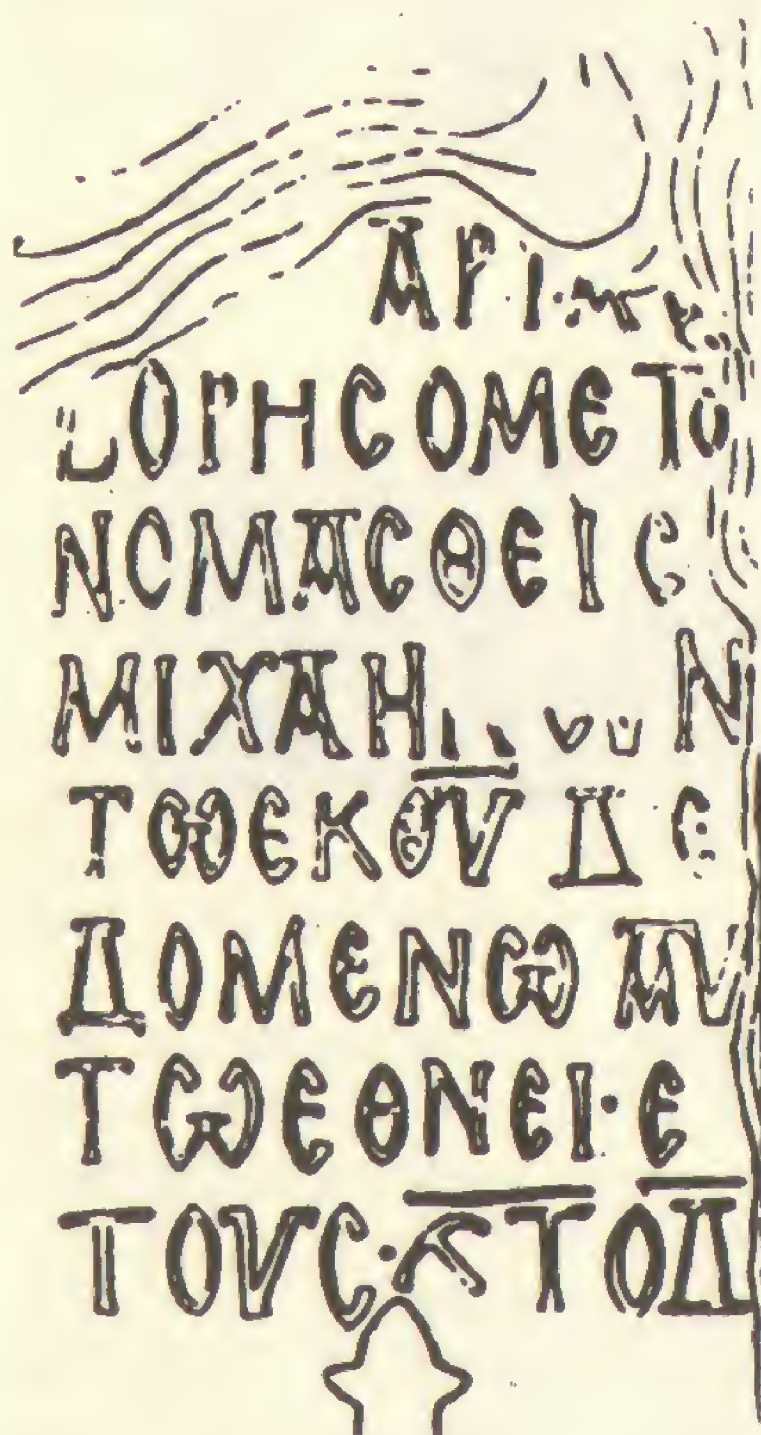


art. By and by they composed their own script and developed their own literature.

The Alexandrian school and library, created in the 3rd century BC, continued in the course of seven centuries to be one of the leading cultural centres of the antique world. Here Claudius Ptolemy's astronomy and geography marked the peak of European knowledge about the earth and the heavenly bodies in the course of one thousand and three hundred years. Though the Bulgars lived far from this great centre of learning, its teachings reached them without dramatic climaxes of dogma or negation and without the religious fanaticism which burned books, destroyed monuments and sent enlightened scholars to the Inquisition.

The cultural development of the Bulgarian people showed their open mind and tolerant receptiveness of the achievements of others as elements shaping a new set of cultural and spiritual values. This was a quest for Truth, and ardent desire to explain our earthly life even through the prism of the Son of God and 'reason in things' or Logos.

The Svetoslav Miscellany includes a Eulogy to King Simeon during whose reign in the ninth century the young state reached the first crest of its cultural development. In this miscellany we find verses dedicated to the man who ruled over the mighty and highly civilized country.



For them a new Ptolemy appeared
 not of the same faith,
 but with the same ardent desire
 and deserving for his gathering
 of all the divine books
 with which he filled his palaces,
 for which he will be remembered
 in time eternal...

This excerpt reflects King Simeon's passion for learning, his high esteem of the cultural traditions of the ancient world. He

was an outstanding writer and scholar during the period when Byzantine civilization set the pace of human progress. He taught the Bulgarian people to value and preserve the written and spoken word as a beacon which would save them from war and slavery. The monk Vissarion wrote:

‘All human glory is like a slender blade of grass. The grass withers and its blossoms drop, while the living word continues to pass from one generation to another.’

Khan Omourtag’s inscription stands like a pillar of wisdom, like a precursor of the writings in the Glagolitic and Cyrillic scripts created by this ‘rugged and indomitable tribe’, which through the ages sought and found its rightful place and road to development in human history.

CHAPTER II

Historical and esthetic aspects of Bulgarian art and the message of the Old Bulgar inscriptions, architecture and stone sculpture

Old books tell us that the Old Bulgars had their own material culture, language, cities and art. Experts now differentiate between a Slavonic type of pottery and Old Bulgar pottery.

Slavonic tribes migrated, mixed with the Thracians and assimilated them. Then the Bulgars came to power in an organized state which survived through the ages.

The Slavs scattered all over the Balkan Peninsula. A 10th century book notes that they settled in the whole of Epirus, in almost the whole of Hellas, the Peloponnesus and Macedonia. In the Peloponnesus alone nearly 400 Slavonic names of places and rivers have been preserved. This is all the more true of the lands in the north.

The Slavonicization of the Balkan Peninsula soon erased from the memory of man the Roman names of the cities, of the numerous ‘ulpias’ bearing the names of emperors or members of their family, of military camps and fortresses. Marcianopolis was

renamed Devnya, Abritus – Razgrad, Dionysopolis – Balchik, Sexanta Prista – Roussé, Nove – Svishtov, the river Jatrus became Yantra, Almus – Lom and Uscus – Iskar. New names replaced the old and certain Latin names were given a Slavonic ring to them.



The indigenous Thracians had preserved their identity for a very long time, but were quickly assimilated by the migrating Slavs. Only few Romaics of Thracian origin remained. This process continued until the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV Pogonate.

It was at this time that Asparuch (third son of the Old Bulgar Khan Kubrat) crossed the Dnieper and Dniester rivers, reached the Danube, pitched camp in the Dobroudja Plain and founded the first Bulgarian state in the year 681.

We know from old chronicles that the Byzantines slandered our forefathers, calling the Thracians, Slavs and Bulgars barbarians, outcasts, and heaping all sorts of abuse. But we also know that the Byzantine armies failed to drive the Bulgarians away; the Greeks were defeated and fled to Varna to their ships. The Bulgarians consolidated their rule. We have from this period an interesting 'List' of the Bulgarian Khans:

'Prince Asparuch from the Doula clan reigned for 61 years, coming to power in the year.....

'Tervel ruled for 21 years. He was from the Doulo clan and came to power in the year....

'....ruled for 28 years. He was from the Doulo clan and came to power in the year....'

We have the names of Khans Sevar, Kormisosh, Vinekh, Telets, Umor...

We have left the field of art, but these ancient inscriptions and chronicles are very instructive. We learn from them about the way of life of our predecessors, how they created and developed a written culture, giving a true picture of the period and making another step forward. It paved the way for what we consider to be a part of the Early Renaissance in Europe, endowed man with the wisdom of antiquity and suggested new media of artistic expression. History took the form of rational art and literature the expression of esthetic observation and emotional response. At first they followed the traditional notation in the Greek script until the time when the creation of the Slav-Bulgarian alphabet opened new horizons for cultural development.

The architectural style of the old Bulgarians is apparent in the first capital at Pliska, where an excavation programme is still under way.

On my last visit I saw a group excavating an area outside the fortress walls. The finds in a number of graves included valuable specimens of the old Bulgarian arts and crafts.

Parts of the city were unearthed and we could clearly see an almost square citadel with massive walls and a deep moat, beyond which were the outer residential quarters, shopping centre, etc. This made me think of an apocrypha of the Bogomil teaching: 'I, the prophet Isaiah, blessed among the prophets by our Lord God Jesus Christ, have come by the Will of God to tell you what will happen in the last days of the human race...' He was talking of an uncertain future, while here before us we had a tale of realities of the past.

It was a tale of the early period of the Bulgarian people and something still very much alive and not doomed, as the Bogomil preacher prophesied.

From other Bulgarian medieval apocrypha we learn that

Despot Slav settled in the land of Carvunia and called it Bulgarian. He built towns and villages for his subjects, who were pagans. Slav also built one hundred mounds (forts) and was known as the Ruler of the One Hundred Mounds. As was often the case in old manuscripts, chieftains are said to have lived a very long life. This tale tells us that Slav reigned for 119 years before he died.



‘And then came another king to the Bulgarian lands – a child raised in a basket until it was three years old, which was given the name of Ispor Tsar. He assumed the reign of the Bulgarian kingdom and built great cities: the City of Drustur on the Danube and a great ditch from the Danube to the sea. He also founded the City of Pliska...’

Pliska is mentioned in Byzantine chronicles and by the 19th- century Czech scholars and historians Karel Skorpil and Constantine Irecek. The Russian archeologist Theodore Ouspensky was to come to Bulgaria in 1899 and discover the site

of Pliska. Excavations in the area are continuing to this day. The donjon of the citadel and the pentagonal tower of the fortress wall show the building and fortress engineering skill of the old Bulgarians. All entrances were protected by double gates and draw bridges.

On a brick we see the drawing of a horse and on many pots and some of the walls there are various types of notches. We cannot yet tell with certainty whether these were decorative patterns or suggest the pre-Slavonic script mentioned by the Bulgarian medieval writer Chernorizets (Blackshirt) Hrabr. The Pliska museum has the stone sculpture of a lion seeming to slumber peacefully, but keeping a sharp eye on life around, as if ready to leap up instantly.

What we have learned about the art of the Old Bulgars shows that they were skilful architects and masons. They built their fortifications of large smooth-hewn blocks of stone facing both sides of the walls, without any rubble fill in between. This differed from the Roman or Byzantine style.

A polished technique went hand in hand with a developed taste for monumentality. The Pliska city gate was over twelve metres high and its design shows the refined taste of its architect.

The public works during the reign of Khan Omurtag in the eighth century bear the mark of archaic austerity, suggesting power and stability. We find elements of this style in the development of Romance architecture in Western Europe. The plastic traditions of old Bulgarian art adopted a number of new forms.

Sentiment and thought were expressed in the handicrafts long before a script appeared. The traditions of the spoken word were maintained by bards, poets and orators. The cultural heritage of the Bulgarians developed in chronicles of stone until the reign of Tsar Boris I, who imposed Christianity as the official religion of his state in 864.

We may stand and admire for hours these specimens of old Bulgarian architecture: solid, rugged, monumental. The walls were smooth and bare, like the mighty chest of a warrior standing firm and dignified against all odds. The builders of this period evidently had no taste for the elaborate and what seemed to them somewhat effeminate Byzantine style. The architect simply placed a massive stone lion on each side of the city gate.



and to give archers several different trajectories somewhat changed the levels and angles of the four towers, pentagonal battlements and of the embrasures.

As we enter the Large Palace built by Khan Omurtag, we see large blocks of cream-coloured stone, as if baked by the southern sun, surrounding a long rectangle with two halls. From what was the reception room a staircase led to the upper floor, reserved only for the personal guests of the Khan. The other very large room was the Military and State Council and banqueting hall, where the emissaries of foreign rulers were received and feasted, and where peace treaties were signed.

This austere, Spartan architecture has simple but very monumental forms, with sparing but stylish interior decoration. The palace was a bastion of a daring and enterprising spirit in a land often devastated by foreign incursions, and yet finally able to lay the foundations of an ethnic community and a state which weathered all storms in the course of a millennium.

Engels said that no matter how unproductive the ninth century might look, it served a useful purpose by forming the nationalities which shaped the future history of the European peoples. He may have had in mind, amongst others, the fact that Europe, the Pope, the Patriarch of Constantinople and the emperor of Byzantium were first to acknowledge a new development of momentous portent – the fact that the Slavs had come, and that they had come to stay! The Roman Empire withered and no one was able to revive it, while the Slav states remained...

The ninth century was in Bulgaria a period of intensive feudalization. The adoption of Christianity as the official religion formed part of radical social, economic, political and cultural changes.

Medieval Bulgaria, in which the fusion of various groups created a specific ethnic identity of the nation, was a country with established forms of administration, urban life and social stratification in which the feudal nobility, the clergy, artisan guilds, episcopalian, scholastic and commercial centres on the seacoast and astride the main continental routes all played their part. Many of the ancient cities survived as new building projects laid one horizon over another. Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Pernik, Lovech, Silistra, Roussé and other cities are all on the sites of human habitations built thousands of years ago.

But let us return to Pliska.

The Small Palace occupied an area of nearly 600 square meters next the northern fortress walls. It was built of large blocks of stone held in place by iron clamps. It is more graceful in spite of its size, with marble columns, capitals, pediments and fine ornamental details. The three-storeyed building had three underground passages connecting it with the citadel. One of them led out of the city, in the area of the northern gate.

The Small Palace was a finer, more important and more useful building than its name denotes. Its three storeys over this large area had reception and banqueting halls, the private quarters of the Khan and his family, guest and servants' rooms. A large tile stove heated the bathroom and a smaller one, the dressing room. Hot water came from a Roman-type hypocaust built under the floor.



I have often visited Pliška, its Great and Small palaces and fortress walls. Archeological diggings are now trying to locate Khan Krum's palace.

The city was not merely a residence of royalty and the boyar nobility; there were many houses of rich citizens, of poor workmen, as well as commercial and storage facilities. The builders evidently had a sense of grace and proportion; they knew how to build columns and arches which produced harmonious architectural patterns. When the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus reached Pliska, he was impressed by its austere barbarian beauty and wealth. The city was plundered and burned to the ground.

An anonymous account in the Vatican describes the events taking place in 811.

'Nicephorus broke into Krum's residence and found rich booty. He drew up a long list of the copper, garments and other things he found and shared them among his troops... After spending several days there, he left the residence of the pagan Krum and burned all the dwellings...'

We hope to find where Krum's palace was, but even more important was the way it was described: a rich city with civil engineering works, good architecture and works of art.

In later days, with the advent of Christianity, the pagan shrine within the citadel was greatly surpassed in size and splen-



dour by what was known as the Great Basilica – the largest building of its kind in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, composed of a large nave and two aisles. It was one hundred metres long and thirty wide and seems to have been built at the time of the baptism of the royal court and nobility. The courtyard forms an atrium, and one can still see the impressive columns with finely chiselled bases, shafts and capitals. On marble slabs we see the names of towns and settlements conquered by the young state: Rodosto, Bourgizo, Arcadiopolis...

In recent years I have met here many Bulgarian scholars trying to find in the area around Pliska new testimony regarding the historical and cultural development of the Old Bulgarians. Their interest has been centred on the Great Basilica, believed to have been built over parts of an older cruciform church, as over thirty excavations have revealed. This explains the writings of Theophylact of Ohrid, in which he mentioned that during the

reign of Prince Boris I, many attractive churches were built 'in round or spherical forms'. This is probably the area of the large monastery complex where the disciples of Cyril and Methodius founded the first Bulgarian literary school.

Diggings have unearthed at Pliska blocks of stone, bricks and capitals brought from fortresses or cities in the region. Some bear the names of famous stone-masons.

The young state built new cities and the first capital of the Bulgarian people. It was of impressive dimensions – a stronghold forming a symbol of strength of a nation with the historic mission to stay and develop. It shaped the historic memory of the Bulgarians for generations to come, with a strong artistic and emotional impact.

In Bulgarian folklore we find the legend that to make a wall, fountain or building really strong, one had to build-in the shadow of some young and handsome maid or lad. We note especially the shadows of the past in the continuation of ancient building traditions and the materials of much older epochs which the Bulgarians used for their massive dwellings and rugged strongholds. We see an esthetic migration from age to age and from place to place, from one style of art to another – a blend between the old and the new achieved with creative harmony.

Here are certain events which were to influence the political and cultural development of the Bulgarians in the next few decades.

Prince Boris adopted Christianity in 864. The process of Christianization of his nobility is thought to have begun at least two years earlier. In spite of the fierce persecution on the part of Boris's predecessors in an attempt to keep sacred the cult of the pagan god Tangra, the Christian teaching could not be stamped out. A Bulgarian historian quotes Paulin, Bishop of Bole (France), that the Bessi – one of the Old Thracian tribes, more rugged than the rugged soil on which they lived – became, after adopting the Christian Word, 'as docile as lambs thronging the pen of peace... rejoicing that they laid not for themselves treasures on earth, but were receiving them through the fruits of their labour and their souls in heaven...'

We understand the enthusiasm of this Christian apologist. The truth probably is that the unruly Bessi who had for cen-

turies fought and held their own against the formidable Romans, now sought comfort in a new philosophy which gave them the hope that the new common religion would result in the fusion of all into one great ethnic community, into one powerful state.



The ancient traditions did not disappear all at once. They were at times revived by powerful ecclesiastic and political leaders. In the difficult years of paganism and Justinian the Apostate, Prince Boris blinded his own son and destroyed many a notable and his family to preserve the new religion of his state. The pagan traditions continued to form the undercurrent of religious and philosophical thought. It could not be erased at one stroke by the adoption of Christianity, which was undoubtedly influenced by the universal concepts of Hellenism and of the Roman Empire.

The concessions made in medieval Bulgaria to the ancient pagan and Thracian cults seem to qualify Christianity as being most of all a political phenomenon and only then a system of some orthodox faith. Neither Prince Boris nor his nobility were actually blinded by the promise of heavenly bliss of the new religion. They seem to have given just as sober a political appraisal of what it was worth and what it could do for them and their country as the Vatican and the Greek Patriarchate at Constantinople hoped this event would do to broaden the sphere of their control. The folklore and myths of the Thracians remained: the Thracian Horseman, good and bad fairies, sacred animals and seasons. To them were added many of the gods which the Slavs venerated – from Perun, the Thunderer, to Veles, god of the flocks. The Church never established a grip on the State and did not share the ideas of theocratic rule current in the East and West. This is the reason why the Bulgarian people were never fettered by church dogmas, blind faith and subservient humility. In fact it was in Bulgaria that some of the most virulent heresies soon found fertile soil to take root in.

A skilfully sculptured leg of a horse has been found on a fragment of a marble slab near the eastern city gate of Pliska. Another reminder of old hero-worship – of the most popular of all Thracian deities – the Thracian Horseman. His votive tablets and sculptures give us an idea of the customs, traditions and development of art in many areas within the territory of present-day Bulgaria.

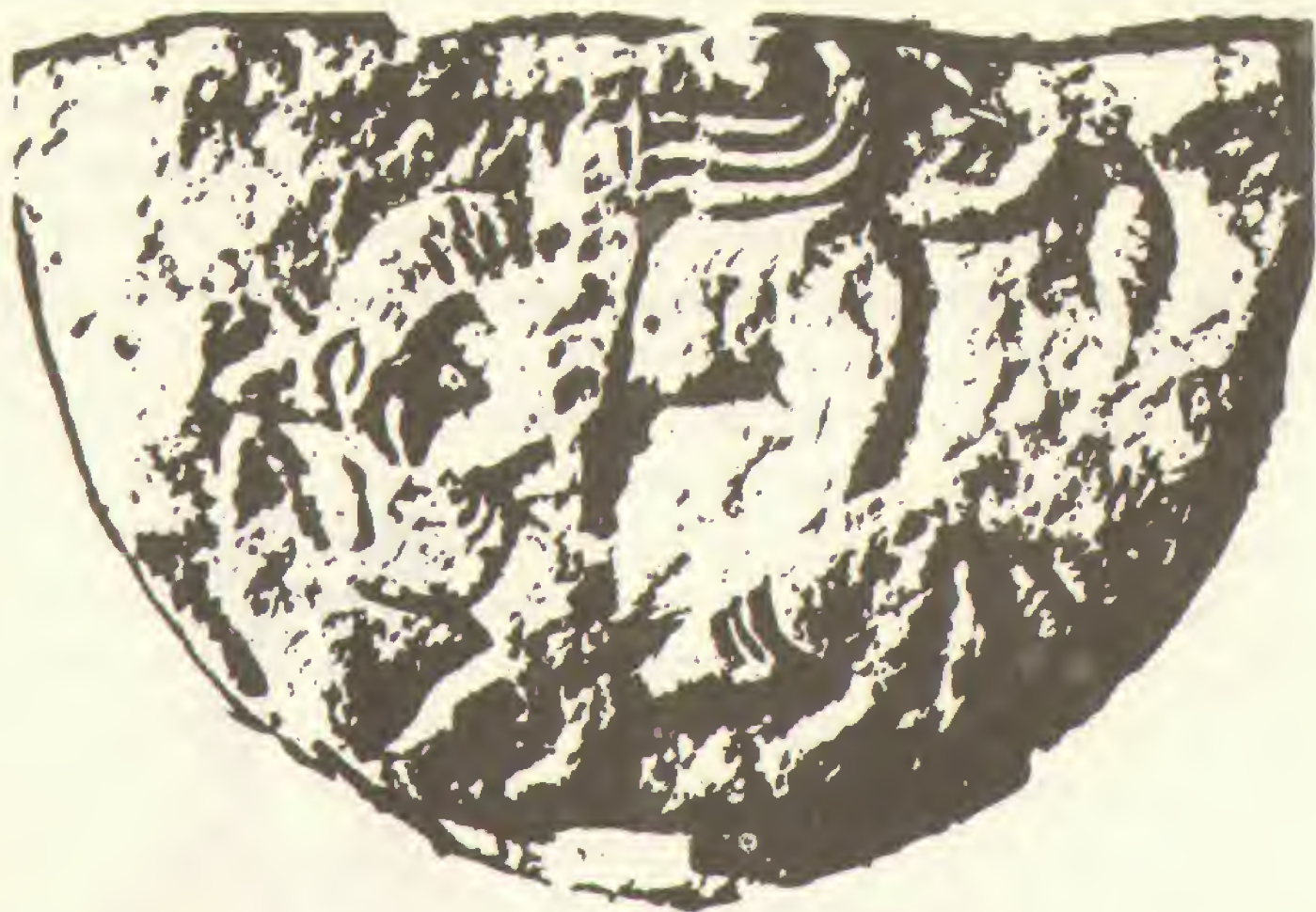
The Museum of History and Art in Vienna has in its collection the famous Nagy St Miklos treasure – named after the place where it was found. In 1799 a Hungarian farmer found in his ploughfield a set of 23 gold vessels. There are more than 70 monographs by eminent historians, archaeologists and authorities on art on the subject of this rare find. Nikola Mavrodinov, the Bulgarian art historian, has patiently sought new proof, showing the St Miklos hoard to have been made by Bulgarian goldsmiths and defined its place in the development of ancient Bulgarian art. He analysed the interaction of various trends of art shaping the artistic values and consciousness of the Bulgarian people through the ages.

In his book *Old Bulgarian Art*, Mavrodinov states that these vessels of exquisite workmanship were made by expert Bulgarian goldsmiths continuing the thematic and genre traditions of the great artists of the past. The vessels were probably used as wine jugs and are noted for their harmonious proportions and clearly marked sections.

Here is a Nagy St Miklos vessel.



The plastic designs on the various planes form a harmonious and organic whole: the foot, rounded stem, slender neck and spout. The vessels are beautifully decorated with palmetto rims, circles of rosettes, intertwined rings and spirals, all designed with great taste and imagination. They are indicative of a high level of cultural development in which one feels elements of many eastern civilizations with which the Old Bulgars were in close contact during their slow westward migration. What they saw in others created a new type or art in which strong Achaemenian



and Mediterranean influences were synthesized into a typical Bulgarian art form of the period.

The ornaments of the Nagy St Miklos treasure contain many horsemen. This is a familiar theme from much earlier times: from the Letnitsa treasure, stone reliefs, the Brezovo ring from the 5th or 4th century B.C., the Thracian Tomb at Kazanluk, from the trappings of Thracian chariots and thousands of votive tablets with the effigy of the Horseman-Hero. He was venerated in the Bulgarian lands. At this period in Carvunia (as northern Bulgaria used to be called) the Slavs and Old Bulgars founded their first state and the Horseman was the symbol of this new ethnic community. This impressive creation of plastic imagination continued to exist and to be represented in modified forms of metaphoric thought.

The development of old Bulgarian art shows the normal balance between influences of other civilizations and originality. The dialectical unity between borrowing and a distinctly personal touch stimulated the development of art. We have no record of outstanding artists; this was an art developed by many. The results of this dialectical creativity become all the more apparent as more finds are unearthed in Bulgaria.

We have spoken about the skill of the old Bulgarian stone masons, but we should add that wood also played a prominent

part in the houses they built - particularly for balconies, galleries, broad eaves and interior decoration. This was probably under the influence of Slavonic architecture, because the toreutic and potters' art was inherited from the Thracians.

From the earliest Byzantine period numerous finds, like the famous Varna gold treasure, rings, bracelets, necklaces, crosses, diadems and gold vessels show that the master gold-smiths in the territory of Bulgaria were familiar with all the established techniques: filigree work, beading, engraving, hammering, incrustation.

We now know that the Great Basilica at Pliska was built over an older Bulgarian church, which itself rose on the site of a still earlier cruciform church with a round cupola. This confirms the remarks made by the medieval writer Theophylact of Ohrid that 'Boris built round churches.' North of the basilica archeologists have found remains of the Archbishopric, two houses and a bath. This was the first Bulgarian scholastic centre of Cyril and Methodius's disciples, which later flourished in the second Bulgarian capital of Preslav in 893-972. The four monasteries at Preslav seem to have been more important as literary centres for the establishment and development of culture in the spoken language of the Bulgarians, than as religious shrines for the worship of God and His Word.

Pliska and Preslav were large cities with strong fortress walls, battlements, round, square and pentagonal towers, massive gates with stylish ornamentation, with palaces and basilicas, administrative and public buildings in which the social and cultural life of the first Bulgarian state developed. Its builders were talented architects, artists, writers, statesmen and warriors.

The basilicas at Pliska, Ohrid, Prespa and Bregalnitsa were among the largest places of worship in the whole of Central Europe. V. Gyuzelev has noted in his book 'Prince Boris I' that this enlightened ruler intended his churches to reflect not only the might and power of the Bulgarian state, but also to rival the cultural development of the advanced countries in the rest of the continent.

Madara is a settlement midway between the first and second

Bulgarian capitals of Pliska and Preslav. It existed in the Late Stone Age and the Stone-Bronze Age (3000 to 1800 years B.C.), and is mentioned as one of the centres of Thracian art in the 4th to the 1st century B.C., and of Thraco-Roman culture in the 1st to 4th c.A.D., and through the period of Byzantine rule in the



5th and 6th centuries. They were followed by the development of two distinct stages in Bulgarian culture from the 8th to the 14th centuries.

In 1872 the Hungarian scholar and traveller Felix Kanitz noticed with his field glasses a figure carved on the face of a vertical cliff near the village of Madara. He thought it to be a product of Roman times, with an inscription in Latin.

In 1884 the Czech historian Constantine Irecek visited the area and identified the inscriptions as Greek, while considering the figure of the Madara Horseman to date from the time when the Bulgarians were still pagans and worshipped the Horseman

above all other ancient Thracian deities.

Next the brothers Skorpil, Czech archeologists, thought the relief to be the effigy of Khan Krum and to have been made on the order of Khan Omurtag.

The well-known Bulgarian epigraphic expert, Professor Vesselin Beshevliev, deciphered the inscription and related it to the reign of Khan Tervel. In 1954 a large group of experts who had studied the Madara Horseman met, considered their findings and interpretations and published a fairly large monograph containing all that had been revealed about the origin and meaning of this historical monument.

Three inscriptions have been deciphered. The first reads:

Justi
nian em
peror
made a
treaty and tried
...the Bulgarians
.....
...and to Tervel
of the Cutnose
emperor...

...was not believed by my uncles
in the Salonica and Kisina
settlements...who departed.
His ... one ...
by treaty Tervel...the emperor's
archont gave.....
.....5 thousand
with me won a good victory

Experts have not yet fully agreed on the text of the other two inscriptions.

Of particular importance to us is the fact that the Madara rock relief forms part of the Stone Chronicle of the development of the Bulgarian people through the ages and the creation of the state and its ethnic identity. These and other similar and clearer inscriptions are an emanation of the philosophy, ethical principles and philosophical outlook of a new nation shaping its destinies.

Certain other stone sculptures also illustrate the development of the artistic talent of the Bulgarians during this early period, which explain the flourishing culture and outstanding literary works during the reign of Tsar Simeon.

Take Khan Krum's inscription at Hambarli (the present-day village of Malomirivo, Yambol District):

'...and my brother did not abandon him but joined him and

by the will of God helped him capture the following towns and fortresses: Serdica, Debelt, Constantia (near Harmanli), Versinikia, Adrianopolis. He captured these well protected fortresses. God struck fear in the hearts of the rest and they (the Romans) left them and fled. Breaking his oath, the old and bald-headed emperor captured the lowlands, from which he led his entire army to devastate our own land. And so our sovereign Krum set out to fight and destroy him...

Khan Krum's Chatalare inscription (the present-day Tsar Krum village, Shoumen District):

'The sublime Khan Omurtag, by the will of God ruler of the land where he was born. Living in his camp at Pliska, he built a place on the River Toucha and led his army there against the Greeks and Slavs. He skilfully built a bridge across the Toucha at the same time as his palace and placed in this palace four columns and above them two lions. May the God-ordained ruler trample asunder the emperor while the waters of the Toucha River flow and until... rule over many Bulgarians and conquer his enemies and thus live to be a hundred in joy and felicity. The time when it was built' was Sigor Elm* according to the Bulgarian count and the 15th Indiction according to the Greek.'

Inscription on a column in a Christian basilica at Philipi, north of Cavalla in Greece.

'Persian, ruler of many Bulgarians by the will of God, sent the Kavkhan Isbul, after giving him troops, nobles of the land and commanders. And so went the Kavkhan to the Smolians. For whoever seeks the truth, God is all-seeing, and whoever lies, God is all-seeing. The Bulgarians did many kind acts to the Christians (meaning the Byzantines), but the Christians forgot them. But God is all-seeing...'

* The Old Bulgars adopted as chronological unit a 12-year cycle, each year of which was given the Turkic name of some animal, while the months were marked with Bulgar numerals. Thus, the first year of the cycle was Somor (mouse), the second Shegor (ox), the third Ver (wolf), the fourth Dvani (hare) and so on. The first month was Alem, the third Vechem, the fourth Turom, and so on. The system of Old Bulgar chronology has been studied by Professor Vassil Zlatarov, Professor Ivan Dujcev, and other Bulgarian historians.

I have picked three out of 80 similar stone inscriptions, mostly from the ninth century, in the Greek vernacular. Professor Beshevliev and other eminent historians rightly consider them to be among the earliest historical sources of the Old Bulgars and the formation of their state. They are also valuable as literary monuments imbued with dramatic philosophical and moral emotionality.

The Bulgarians were rugged warriors. Strict account was kept of all weapons distributed to troop commanders, and the military preparedness of the army to defend the land was closely supervised. The estates of the country nobility were deployed to form one or several defence lines against any foreign incursion. The Bulgarians were outspoken and always kept their pledge of fidelity.

They built cities and palaces and made certain that whatever they created would not be lost in the turbulent upheavals in the Middle Ages, when war, cruelty and devastation were all a matter of daily routine. The Bulgarians had a keen sense of right and wrong; of what deserved praise and what should be punished.

A gradual process shaped the ethnic identity of the Bulgarian people. It formed the nucleus of a constantly broadening horizon, starting from the pictorial representation of a generalized philosophy and ethical standard and passing through the plastic formulations of truths and postulates of an established moral code.

The continuance of history and art is apparent in the famous **Madara Horseman**. Apart from its artistic merits, we no longer have here the impersonification of any concrete Khan or sovereign portrayed in time and place: neither a symbolic image of heroic forefathers, as was often the case in the sculptural art of the Thracians. The Horseman is not an effigy of someone gone to the world beyond; we feel him to be the image of earthly flesh and blood, the symbol of victory and of the awareness that the young Bulgarian state rides firmly in the saddle. This work of art was also intended to show that it was prepared to face any challenge.

The Madara Horseman has been carved on the face of a ver-



tical cliff, twenty-three metres above ground level. From down below some details cannot be clearly seen with the naked eye, but the general impression is of one of harmonious overall composition in which the three figures are portrayed in true perspective. The self-possessed bold rider on his sturdy charger wears a long pleated mantle. His feet are in stirrups. On his back is strapped something which looks like an archer's quiver.

The horse is small but sturdy, with a massive chest. We seem to hear the solid beat of each hoof on the rocky ground as it trots along. One of the legs steps high and some experts have been inclined to think that dressage was a familiar part of equestrian art. The hind legs are in a graceful motion and one feels in the splendid figure of the horse the shift of weight from one side to the other.

Beside the legs of the horse lies a dead lion, while the dog runs behind the rider. The composition is in the form of an ascending interchange of low and high relief.

The paws of the dead lion are of an animal clawing the earth in the throes of death. We see his mane and his head, drooping lifeless. The tip of the spear thrust firmly into the lion's back reaches the belly of the horse. The snarling dog is excited by the hunt, showing a tired tongue and two rows of sharp teeth. It has evidently come too late to take part in the kill.

As we said before, this expressive stone sculpture is not a monument associated with some cult. It is an earthly specimen of the first Bulgarian state indicative of the opening of new horizons in the development of history and art. A stone engraving found at Pliska in 1950 depicts the same horse, with a massive bulging chest and majestic gait.

On another find we see a group of horsemen probably taking part in a hunt, for we see the ground around them strewn with spears and arrows.

On the newly discovered part of the Preslav fortress wall we also find life-like images and scenes engraved on stone.

Some of these drawings are rather primitive and schematic, but they are full of vitality and depict scenes from common occupations, hunting and warfare. The ordinary stone masons wanted to make their work more attractive; they may have been part-time soldiers, commemorating their own eventful experiences. The artistic urge is strongly apparent.

Totyó Totev, the well-known expert on old Bulgarian art, has noted that in most cases this creative urge was an emanation of original popular talent, not influenced by local or foreign iconographic patterns. The works of these ordinary stone masons depict the realities of life around.

Art historians often quote Michelangelo who, bent over a slab of marble, sought to 'release the figure from its stone fetters'. This makes us think of his unfinished sculpture of St Matthew of 1506. We have the impression that the Apostle is making every effort to break away from his hard clutch of the rock and soar towards new and bright horizons.

We are giving this example because of a faint analogy with the Madara Horseman. Here, too, the horse and rider have broken away from the dead matter to make history. Their road is clear and set, and the face of the rock has become an emotional

specimen of historical art reminding one of the manly and bold generations that have gone before us.

This is only one aspect of the historical and esthetic road to development of the old Bulgarians.

CHAPTER III

Another aspect of Old Bulgarian art and the period when historical annals and plastic art shaped the material and spiritual life of the Bulgarian people

Certain episodes remind us of how the indomitable spirit of Spartacus was revived by the younger generations of Thracians who defended their highlands, strongholds and mountain passes against Roman incursions. This was a period in which history witnessed the arrival of the Slavs, then of the Bulgarians, their fusion and foundation of the first Bulgarian state. The formation of a national and ethnic identity marked an important step forward and was reflected in the development of art: in works like the Nagy St Mikols treasure, the Madara Horseman, the stone engravings at Madara and Preslav, the impressive architectural style of the first Bulgarian capital, to culminate in the flowering of literature and art during the Golden Age of Simeon's reign. The ethnic identity of the new Bulgarian community had a strong emotional impact on the development of art through the ages.

As all other alien tribes, the Bulgarians were called barbarians, simply because they were not Hellenes or Romans. Even when rich Thracians rose in the hierarchy of the Roman administration or army, they were not considered as the equals of those who actually governed the empire, even during the period of barbarization and provincialization of the Roman Empire.

The Slavs, like the Bulgarians, were also barbarians. Both were feared rather than despised by Byzantium, as illustrated by various historical accounts.

The Syrian historian John of Ephesus noted:

‘During the third year of the reign of Tiberius the Conqueror (581) the accursed Slavs set out and invaded the whole of Hellas, and the areas around Thessalonica and the whole of Thrace.’

But later, the chronicler noted that these Slavs fought according to the best rules of military art and in the siege of Thessalonica and other cities showed exceeding military skill, cunning and sagacity.

Many Byzantine historians slandered the Bulgarians, but in the early 6th century Procopius said that the Bulgarians had plenty of grain and wine, that they knew how to make sweetmeats, that some had baths, that they wore gold ornaments and that foreign fine-woven gold-braided chitons were not uncommon. We also learn that the Bulgarians skilfully protected their possessions with deep ditches, such as have been found along the Danube and around the first Bulgarian capital at Pliska.

The ‘barbarian’ Slavs and Bulgarians did not lag behind the latest developments of military skill, building methods and in the establishment of an orderly state with its own laws and stable administration. This gave them a feeling of confidence and self-esteem.

The Bulgarian historian Vassil Zlatarski quotes the Byzantine historian Menander (later gaining distinction as a jurist, military dignitary and a true follower of Constantine VII Porphyrogenite), who described the reply made by a ‘barbarian’ at a meeting with the Byzantine emperor in 576.

‘Aren’t you one of those Romeics who can tell a lie in ten different tongues?’

Saying these words, Khan Tourxath placed the ten fingers of his hands in his mouth and continued.

‘Just as I now have ten fingers in my mouth, so you Romeics use many tongues. With some you lie to me; with others you deceive my slaves, the Avars. To speak plainly, when you lavish praise on all peoples with your glib tongues, you do not care when they plunge headlong into some misfortune, which will only be of benefit to you. Supposed to be the ambassadors of good will, you come to me garbed in lies, and the one who sent you is no better than a cheat.’

In later days our forefathers were on other occasions wronged by scheming Byzantine emperors. But there is no room for sentimental recrimination. The Byzantine emperors were the architects of a large multinational state through a period of many centuries. They were not always strong militarily and they sought to use the tribes settling within their realm to form sanitary cordons to protect them against foreign incursions from the north and east. Didn't Rome in its time also pursue a treacherous policy towards allies and neighbours if there was anything to gain by it? Later Bulgarian khans and kings like Telerig, Krum and Simeon were also often given false promises and this may be yet another reason why a sense of justice and fair treatment is so conspicuous on the oldest Bulgarian stone monuments and later in polemical works, the lives of rulers and apocrypha.

Certain other facts are also indicative of the inherent vitality and dynamic development of a culture which side by side with the Byzantine civilization continued the traditions of antiquity. It created an expressive form of religious art, developed historically under the rule of law and order, gained distinction in literature and in a versatile and at the same time dogmatic philosophical thought.

Historians know little about the reign of Khan Malamir and only three epigraphic monuments of that period have been found so far.

One of them notes that the Kavkhan Isvul built an aqueduct and delivered it to his khan with great pomp. The festivities were attended by the Greater and Lesser Boyars and military commanders. A large slab contained the inscription: May by the will of God the divine prince live to be a hundred, together with Kavkhan Isvul.'

This aqueduct seems to have been built for Omurtag's 'Great Aul' (settlement), which was later known as Preslav. Like Pliska, Preslav also had a modern water supply system.

And so the alien ('barbarian') newcomers either had or quickly acquired all that the old and advanced nations had achieved in their long history. This is evident from the records which wise men left on stone, parchment, leather or wood.

When V.Zlatarski deciphered one of the most interesting relics of old Bulgarian culture, the 'List of the Bulgarian Khans', he established that the Bulgars used a twelve-year cycle of lunar (not solar) years. It may have lacked precision, but is nevertheless a sign of the chronology which marked the deeds of those who led the Bulgars and shaped their destinies.

Our count of history began in 681, with the foundation of the First Bulgarian State by Asparuch. V.Zlatarski has called it 'the Bulgarian era'.

The legislative system of Khan Krum marked another milestone in the development of the young Bulgarian state. Historians are analysing the economic and political reasons which made an enlightened ruler like Khan Krum (802-814) formulate his will with the clarity of Biblical commandments. The laws were directed against cheats and slanderers – the penalty was death. They also punished drunkards, and misers who refused to help their needy brethren. Every law embodied some basic moral principle and tended to develop moral purity, generosity and a righteous communal life. We know about Krum's laws mainly from the writings of the Byzantine chronicler Svida, who compared these strict provisions with the morality of Byzantium, where court intrigues, coups, lies and slander, loose living, greed and bribery undermined the foundations of the great empire. Krum's laws placed on an equal footing the poor and the rich, nobles and commoners, Bulgarians, and Slavs. Khan Krum ruled a Slav-Bulgarian state surrounded by powerful enemies and unity, cohesion and equality among all sections of the people were imperative if his state was to survive.

Khan Krum's laws are proof of his statesmanship, but he was also a very able military leader. Legend tells us that he passed his strict laws when he heard from a prisoner of war that the loose morality of the Avars caused the ruination of their state. Krum's forces in the campaign against Constantinople included battering rams, liquid fire, stone and arrow catapults, scaling ladders, assault towers and other equipment which formed part of the arsenal of every modern army of the period. Professor Vassil Zlatarski described in a monograph the

mechanism and action of each of these ancient pieces of siege machinery, invented by Carthaginians, Greeks and Romans and developed through the Middle Ages until the discovery of powder.

The armies of the Bulgars were well trained, disciplined, with well organized front line and supply services.



From an inscription on a stone slab at the Madara museum we learn that 'Yuk boyar had 26 shirts of mail, Ichigu 12, Zitko Miros 17, Yuk commander 22, and Biri 22. On a column at the Pliska museum we read:

'Zitko Ichirgu boil: 445 armoured plate shirts, 540 helmets, 427 chain mail shirts; Turgun Zhpan: 20 shirts of plate mail, 40 helmets, 1 chain mail shirt...'

An inscription from Krum's reign in the old Bulgar language but written in Greek letters gives further information regarding the Bulgarian army:

'...I, Krum, appointed my brother, and the strategos Leo to be under his command. On the right side of Beroya.. and as far as Dultroini Ichirgu Boil Tuk shall be first; strategos Vardan and strategos Yani shall be under his command. On the left side of

my state: for Anhialo, Debelt, Sozopolis and Ranuli. Boil Kavkhan Iratis shall be in command and strategi Cordilos and Grigoros shall be in his service...'

The historian V.Beshevliev has noted that this inscription was probably related to Krum's war with Byzantium in 814. Among the military commanders there were several Byzantine strategi who had sided with the Bulgar khan. But they did not justify his trust and we find him speaking wrathfully of the 'infidel Romeics'.

This feeling of self-confidence and distinction created new and higher values in the field of art, in the building and ornamentation of new cities. These stone inscriptions shaped the historical memory of the young nation, and the philosophy, ethical and esthetic principles which characterized the life in Pliska and Madara.

For the Bulgars dignity was a virtue in itself. In 705 the deposed emperor Justinian II asked the Bulgar khan Tervel to help him regain his throne at Constantinople. But Tervel wanted the emperor first to acknowledge the royal rank of the Bulgar khan. And so Justinian had to place on Tervel's shoulders a royal mantle and honour him as Caesar of the Bulgars. Two thrones were placed next to each other. On the one sat Justinian as basileus of the Byzantine Empire, and on the other Tervel, as Bulgar Caesar.

According to the lexicographer Svida, on this occasion Tervel addressed the people in one of the largest halls of the palace, used whenever high dignitaries received promotion or other high honours. Here Tervel received rich gifts.

Vassil Zlatarski notes that the recognition of Tervel as Caesar of the Bulgars greatly enhanced his status. In Byzantine court hierarchy a Caesar was of somewhat inferior rank to an emperor, but Justinian paid tribute to Tervel as a man of equal merit, though wanting in the power and brilliance of the Byzantine court.

In strengthening and expanding the confines of his realm, Tervel realized the necessity of creating a still closer fusion of Bulgars and Slavs into one single ethnic group. The idea of creating a large and highly civilized Bulgaro-Slav state in the Balkan Peninsula was formulated by Asparuch, consolidated by

Telerig, clearly expressed in Krum's policy, to find complete realization during the reign of Boris and Simeon.

In the pre-Christian period the Bulgars on more than one occasion defended their ethnic identity.



Khan Omurtag and the Byzantine emperor Leo V agreed on a thirty-year peace treaty at the end of 814 or the beginning of 815. What is known as the Süleiman Köy inscription marks the provisions of the treaty and notes the festivities by which the treaty was made public at a time when signing, ratification and other formalities of present-day international law had not yet been instituted. On this occasion, too, the Byzantine chronicler, Deacon Ignatius, could hardly dissimulate his hatred of the young Bulgarian state and the fact that the negotiations between Byzantium and Bulgaria were held on an equal footing. He wrote:

‘Truly, for this shameful and unbecoming treaty of friendship which he (Leo) has concluded with the border Huns, who could refrain from shedding tears? Because he applied their customs and they applied ours and thus sealed the accord. And the people saw the Byzantine emperor pour with his own hands a glass of water on the ground, and personally turn horse saddles and grip triple plaited belts and lift grass, and by this ritual risk a curse upon his head, while the pagans touched with their unclean hands our divine symbols and made a pledge in recognition of their power...’

This gives an idea of the customs and traditions of our forefathers. But even more important is the strong resentment of the Byzantine chronicler of the growing strength and self con-

fidence of the Bulgar people and its rulers. It also shows that the wise men of the young state lacked the prejudices which fettered the minds and hearts of the Byzantines. The Bulgars associated freely with their neighbours and were not offended by their customs and rituals. In this intercourse far-sighted political reasons prevailed and gradually changed many of the customs, thoughts and caste traditions of the Bulgar nobility. They looked towards the future in the pursuit of their great goal – the formation of a strong ethnic state. In the best interests of the state paganism was eventually replaced by the Christian faith. But at this period the acceptance of the Christian rite was for Khan Omurtag a matter of expediency. He did not favour the Christians in his realm and after the conclusion of this treaty he is known to have persecuted them and even to have imprisoned for this reason some of his court favourites. However, one should also take into account the fact that many Christians in his realm probably shared the indignation of Deacon Ignatius and the general Byzantine view that this was a desecration of their holiest symbols.

This gives us the background which influenced the development of the Bulgarian builders and artists of this period. The well-known archeologist S. Vaklinov has rightly noted that in the monumentality and style of all that was built at Pliska during the first two centuries of the Bulgarian state one feels a conception born out of the dictates of the period, but looking forward in the pursuit of a clear goal that would shape the destinies of the people.

This trend of thought is evident in the Madara Horseman, as a reincarnation of the ancient traditions in the quest of new media of expression. A new style had not yet crystallized and the Horseman was still bound by a certain eclecticism. But we find an effort to generalize the experience of long observation in a monument whose artistic value and historical significance have been enhanced with the passage of centuries.

Drawings of the common people and of ordinary soldiers in their camps show the important part which songs played in the traditions of the Bulgarian people. They were often narratives of what they had seen in the wide and wondrous world. They were

another channel in which the artistic urge of the Bulgarians found expression and sought new channels of development.

The decorative patterns of the large palace buildings included elements of ancient art: columns, ornamental slabs with compositions in high relief, friezes, capitals, etc. They were usually simple and functional, as the builders and decorators had no taste for the lavish architectural style of the late Hellenistic period and its dazzling but rather effeminate glitter.



A number of belt trimmings of fine workmanship have been found at Madara: golden beads, plaited gold wire, precious stones and enamel. The elaborate trimmings of the gold, silver or bronze girdles marked the social or military status of the man or warrior. They are indicative of the artistic talents of the Bulgar gold and silversmiths, and their ability to design and produce works of art combining different elements and materials. Two belts found at Madara and another near the village of Vetren, as well as the fine pottery found at Novi Pazar, at the Golyama Mogila mound near Pliska and elsewhere show various aspects of the development of the Bulgar arts and crafts. The pots were thin and delicate, well baked, decorated with fine horizontal or undulating lines.

A Bulgar jug (now in the Sofia Archeological Museum) is another tribute to the artistry of the Bulgar craftsmen. It is egg-shaped, with a slender neck and a well-shaped spout to prevent spilling. The neck and body of the jug are separated by several

horizontal stripes, which are repeated to mark off the foot. The ornaments are in the form of bright vertical stripes and undulating indentations creating the impression of rippling water.

Another jug, found at Novi Pazar, has a scaly surface, imitating metal. Archeologists have found in the Golyama Mogila mound near Pliska jugs and pots of various forms and sizes, which have been used as prototypes by later generations of Bulgarian master potters.

We are able to follow a general trend, in which historical records, scholastic works and the plastic arts gradually shaped the general culture, social and cultural development of the Bulgarian people.

The creative urge manifested in brilliant literary developments was the emanation of visual philosophical thought in the course of centuries, fertilized by the cultural heritage of antiquity and incorporated in the urge of the young state to take its place among the most civilized nations in Europe. This penchant for plastic thought and expression left its mark on each stage of the cultural development of the Bulgarian people. Pottery, toreutics, sculptures, the fine and decorative arts formed the background of scholastic progress. This was a harmony of past and present, of tradition and a forward-looking creative urge, a memory of the past and vision of the future.

For quite some time the fine and decorative arts went hand in hand; barbarian and Christian tastes, mythological and iconographic symbolism mixed freely. In the Bulgar gold treasure found at Nagy St Miklos we find elements of the animalistic style of the Thracians and Hellenistic ornamental patterns, but this is not a case of eclecticism. The organic creative vision of Bulgar art of this period was a stream fed by the tributaries of past and present, and of religious and worldly symbolism.

The mural paintings in the Thracian tomb at Kazanluk from the 4th century B. C. are among the finest specimens of ancient art. But there was evidently a break in the artistic traditions in the Bulgarian lands, obviously due to the perturbations caused by the migrations of new tribes, mainly Slavs and Bulgars. The new arrivals made a hesitant start and one cannot compare the standard of the Thracian tomb with the cruder image of Prince

Boris in Constantine Preslavski's 'Teachings of the Gospel', in the painted and glazed ceramic icons at Preslav, the light drawings of the common people and soldiery on the fortress walls of Preslav, Pliska and Madara, nor in the glittering illuminations of the Dobreisha Gospel, and numerous other psalters and chronicles. These are all new and original trends in the development of Bulgarian art.

Many experts consider typical Bulgarian art to have originated from Preslav. Like the art of the Ohrid school, we find painting fusing with scholastic writings which strengthened the sense of belonging to a large ethnic community. Scholars, artists and philosophers were influenced by the development of religious thought, by the theological concepts of Byzantium and by the desire of kings and hierarchs to consolidate the new religion. But, at the same time, the worldly spirit in the broadest sense of the word flickered in the learned books.

A historian has rightly called certain parts of Yoan the Exarch's 'Hexameron' a monograph of the relationship between art and reality.

'Whenever we see the painting of a man, or horse, or lion and call them by their names, we give them these names because the paintings are facsimilized realities. The same is true of icons painted on a wall – like the man, horse, or lion – it is by old habit that we call them by their names...'

This formulation of esthetic realities shows that mural paintings, works of art and the reproduction of man's image were common in the churches and monasteries.

Roman traditions and the brilliant Byzantine mosaic style did not gain a following in the Bulgarian lands. Experts are probably right when they consider this to be due to the preference of the Bulgarian people for simpler and more accessible forms of art, with no desire to imitate the glamorous specimens of Byzantine art, as was the case on the shores of North Africa, Greece, Sicily and many areas in Italy. An eminent authority on art like Andrey Grabar has noted a number of artistic conceptions in early Bulgaria which had no little impact on the development of art on the continent.

Thracian art, the Preslav, Ohrid and Turnovo schools of art, literary developments and the fine mural paintings in the Boyana

and Turnovo churches tell the exciting story of the development of art through eventful periods of Bulgarian history. As part of the European cultural heritage, during all these stages Bulgarian medieval art is, above all, a portrayal of man in his living environment and psychological dynamism. We do not feel the time gap, for it is a form of art whose content can be easily understood and identified with the present.

An 11th century apocrypha, known as the Prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah, interlaces historical truths, romantic vision, national awareness and mystic religious retrospect. But this profoundly religious medieval writing also illustrates the consolidation of a national identity. The writer is thought to have been born somewhere in the area between Sofia and Skopije and this is his story:

‘And then I heard a voice which spoke to me and said...Isaiah, my beloved prophet, go west of the uppermost boundaries of Rome, lead off the third group of Cumans, called Bulgars, and populate the Carvunian land which the Romans and Hellenes have evacuated. And then, brethren, I passed by the left side of Rome, and separated the third group of Cumans and led them along, pointing the road with my finger. And so we came to the river named Zatiusa, and to another river named Ereusa... and I populated the Carvunian land, known as Bulgarian...’

The above inscription was found in 1905 at the village of Chatalare (now Tsar Krum) near Shoumen, together with a stone lion. It is thought to be from the reign of the Khan Presian during the turbulent period of paganism. The lion was a prominent element in Bulgar art, as a symbol of stability, strength and faith in the future in the face of all adversities.

CHAPTER IV

Monumentalization of man and his artistic ideas; politics and art, worldly themes in religious art as elements of cultural development during the Golden Age of the first Bulgarian state

In 1905 F.Ouspensky represented the Russian Archeological Institute in excavations in the Preslav area. He stated in his report:

‘The extreme insignificance of the things found so far at Preslav and the diggings made earlier by the Bulgarian scholar Mr Zlatarski and during the current year by the Russian Archeological Institute suggest the inevitable conclusion of the great scarcity of relics from the Preslav period. Religious buildings have been destroyed to their foundations and public buildings, with the exception of the walls and military fortifications, have suffered the same fate...’

The Russian archeologists remarked that not a single inscription from the period had been found and that the diggings produced little of scientific value. They only gave an idea of past glory.

Today we are considerably better informed, because since the triumph of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria on September 9th, 1944, interest in archeology has been stimulated by generous government support. Preslav had been wantonly plundered in the course of centuries because of its wealthy stone palaces and churches. Its libraries, books, monasteries and artisan workshops had been destroyed. With great pains, historians and archeologists like Krustyu Miyatev, Nikola Mavrodinov, Vera Ivanova-Mavrodinova, Stancho Vaklinov, Yordanka Changova and Totyu Totev have reconstructed an approximate picture of how the city looked in the old days. Step by step, by piecing together fragment after fragment, experts of the older and younger generation are continuing their efforts to reconstruct the splendour of Preslav, as it was described in the 9th century ‘Hexameron’ of the eminent Bulgarian medieval writer Yoan the Exarch.

‘Whenever a poor and simple peasant comes from afar and beholds the towers guarding the entrance to the princely palace.

he is filled with wonder; and when he draws near, passes through the gates and sees on either side the buildings with marble and wood carved ornaments, he is astounded; and when he reaches the citadel and sees the tall palaces and buildings profusely decorated with stone and wood sculptures and rich colours, and lined inside with marble, gold and silver, he thinks them beyond



compare, for never before has the peasant seen anything like it in his own land of straw-thatched huts. And the poor man gapes in wonder and thinks he must be dreaming..

‘And he may happen to see the prince, sitting dressed in a mantle studded with pearls, with a gold chain on his neck, gold bracelets on his hands, with a velvet sash and gold sword on his thigh, with boyars sitting on each side wearing gold necklaces, girdles and bracelets...And if, on return to his land he should be asked what he saw there, he would reply: “Truly, it defies description. It is only with your own eyes that you could be awed

by this splendour; only your eyes and mind can overflow with ecstasy at this great beauty!" ' ,

We now have an idea why the court, government, cultural and scholastic institutions abandoned Pliska as a capital and moved to Preslav. The archeologist Ivan Venedikov has studied the three Inventory Lists found at Preslav, showing that even before it was chosen as the capital city, it was a strong military centre. We learn from these records that Preslav had 1175 cuirasses and more than 1700 metal helmets. In the 8th and early 9th century Preslav was the strategic military centre of the country and the ground offered natural protection against enemy attack. Venedikov thinks that there was an even more important reason.

By changing their capital to Preslav the Bulgarian rulers moved once and for all out of their tribal camp and settled in a centre created by the dynasty, in which they relied on the support of the two ethnic components forming Bulgaria as a nation: the Old Bulgars and the Slavs.

The Bulgarians were good warriors and punished severely those who did not take proper care of their weaponry or military installations. But they were also shrewd politicians, and the change of the capital to Preslav in 893 was dictated mainly by political considerations. By imposing Christianity as the official religion of his state in 864, Prince Boris showed that Bulgaria was ready to take its place among the most powerful nations on the continent. He realized the great power wielded by the Catholic Church in Rome and by the Orthodox Church based on Constantinople and sought the best way of preserving his state and relative spiritual freedom. Letters and chronicles from the reign of Boris and Simeon show their role in the intricate political game of the period, in which their basic aim was to preserve, strengthen and raise the political and cultural status of the Bulgarian people. This was a period of radical transformations in the history of Europe. Engels has characterized this epoch as one witnessing the formation of new nationalities and a redistribution of the peoples in Europe on the eve of historical developments. The Bulgarian people and their country had come to stay!

Boris was firm, for he realized that it would be fateful for Bulgaria to swerve from the road he had chosen for the nation. He did not hesitate to sin against his conscience when he destroyed those of the nobility who opposed the adoption of Christianity; he deposed his own son Vladimir and placed Si-meon on the throne and only then withdrew and sought atone-ment for his cruelty in the seclusion of the walls of a monastery.



With wisdom and foresight, Boris realized that the replies of Pope Nicholas I in 866 were motivated by political considerations rather than by the voice of conscience. The Pope said that Boris had 'somewhat sinned' when after killing in-subordinate parents he had also killed their innocent children, who had never taken up arms against him. But argued the great pontiff, Boris had sinned as a champion of the Christian religion

or through ignorance, rather than through the spur of vice. In view of his repentance, Christ the All-Merciful would grant him His forgiveness!

This enlightened ruler found in Christianity the best instrument of protecting the young Bulgarian state and created conditions for cultural development which strengthened the self-confidence and broadened the outlook and interests of his people. The author of *The Complete Life of Kliment* tells us how in 966 the Slavonic pupils of the great educators Cyril and Methodius, after they were expelled from Moravia by the Catholic clergy, were warmly welcomed by Prince Boris:

‘And when they arrived, Boris met them with all the honours due to such distinguished and esteemed men in every respect, and had them tell him of their experiences. They told their story from beginning to end, omitting nothing. When the Prince heard it, he thanked God for sending such benefactors to Bulgaria. He gave them an abundance of everything they needed, knowing full well that even the slightest concern for the needs of the body detracts from the contemplation of God. He had the ardent desire to meet and talk with them every day, to hear their stories of the past, accounts of the lives of saints, and from their lips to hear the Scriptures...’

Boris helped Bulgaria join the family of civilized nations in this part of the world and paved the way for its cultural development and for the fulfilment of the mission of Constantine (Cyril) the Philosopher, which stimulated the literary development of the entire Slavonic world.

During this period the far-sighted political line and literary development went parallel with a continuation and enrichment of the artistic traditions of the Bulgarian people on the way towards a qualitatively new historical and esthetic level.

Literature and art during the reign of Boris and Simeon may be generalized as an exploration of the main avenues of esthetic self-realization and a linking of politics and art, of history and beauty.

During this period the magic of the written word predominated over the plastic media of expression. Architecture glorified victories in the battlefield using the antique principles of

decorative design and coloured ceramic work, while books intended to develop the mind were presented in a form which also gladdened the eye.

Many of these inherent traditions gave the newer trends greater distinction and a mellow touch to rugged extremes. They were reincarnated into new forms of symbolic art, or appeared as mutations of classic models. Though, historically speaking, this was a new epoch, it was marked by the revival of the ancient traditions fairly long before the Italian Renaissance.

Certain students of the Renaissance suggest that its characteristic humanism was, above all, an esthetic trait rather than a rule of ethic behaviour. This may not be entirely true, particularly if we agree that in the period of Simeon's reign the seeds of Renaissance thought and art had been sown. In Simeon's time the esthetic and ethic principles were dialectically linked; and so were the thought about the place and behaviour of man in the course of social development and his esthetic achievements. The outward religious monumentalism was imbued with a feeling of a historical mission. This is apparent in the architecture of Preslav, the miniature illuminations, fine ceramics, decorative motifs of its buildings and in the writings of outstanding Bulgarian scholars of the period. In the next few decades the ethic principles continued to develop hand in hand with the esthetic principles and even predominated in the apocrypha of the Bogomil movement and in old Bulgarian legends.

The phenomena of the Renaissance are not necessarily a revival of the traditions or lessons of antiquity. In the literary field there was direct borrowing from Byzantium, but in the plastic arts there is an organic link with the traditions of the past. The continuation of the link is apparent in the architectural and decorative styles, in the keen interest in the philosophy of Aristotle, Democritus and Plato. Bulgarian writers and scholars discussed and even argued their philosophical formulations. We have a good example of this in Yoan the Exarch's 'Hexameron'.

The unbroken line of the ancient traditions is evident in the archbishop's basilica, built by Boris. It is remindful of Roman architecture. Nikola Mavrodinov had itemized the classic elements in old Bulgarian architecture: pilastered walls, portals, antique columns, cylindrical cupolas. In 'The Budding

Renaissance in Medieval Bulgaria' (published in 1971) Professor K.Krustev calls Tsar Simeon a scholar enlightened by the highest Hellenistic civilization in our history.

In a letter to Tsar Simeon, Nicholas the Mystic wrote: 'I know that you like to read over and over again the books of the ancients...' Simeon had gone for his studies to the Magnaur School in Constantinople – which was a model of worldly



education for its time. He had been sent there by his father, Boris. We learn from the writings of Liutprand, Bishop of Cremona, that Simeon studied in Byzantium the oratorical art of Demosthenes and Aristotle's syllogisms.

From later writings we learn that Simeon was popularly known to have been the author of many books and to have 'loved books more than anything else'. Yoan the Exarch may have had in mind Simeon and certain other learned men of his court when he wrote in the prologue of his 'Hexameron': 'If those who have their fill of meat and drink have rosy cheeks and look bright and cheerful, how far happier are those who feast on good thoughts, ponder on God's handiwork and, feeling their blessing, would like others to see and feel them.'

Konstantin Preslavski's 'Prologue' gives examples showing the flourishing literary activities in 9th and 10th century Bulgaria. He adjured people to abandon their life of beastly lust and indulgence:

May these words of wisdom not remain
in your dull minds
as the unintelligible sound
of a clanging cymbal!

This righteous call has a very worldly message, intended to preserve the moral virtues of the Slav-Bulgarian people in daily life.

Yoan the Exarch does not agree with Aristotle. The tutor of Alexander of Macedon included heaven among the basic elements of Nature. The Bulgarian scholar favours Plato's conception of four elements: earth, air, fire, water. Because materialism was alien to medieval Christian ideology, Yoan the Exarch later disagreed with Thales, Democritus and Parmenides.

However, Yoan the Exarch spoke of Nature with great inspiration. He was not a recluse with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes seeking to find the Hand of God in the mystic twilight of the church or monastery walls. He called Man the Light of the Universe. We remember his famous saying: 'The Light produced our wheat, but Reason discovered how to make our bread!' Man and his creative urge is the centre of the universe. Truth and Man are the main element. Konstantin Preslavski also believed in the virtuous man: 'Keep God's commandments without fear of kings, without being awed by princes, without being intimidated by courtiers!'

The writings of the period were bound to have a theological lining, as did the building of churches and monasteries, cities and palaces. But they had an even stronger earthly impact. Tsar Simeon and other old Bulgarian scholars gained wisdom from the ancient philosophers; builders learned from the fine architecture and decorative patterns of the ancient masters.

The continuing interest in antique forms is explained by the fact that the Thraco-Roman building traditions were still very much alive. The old Bulgarian master-builders were sensitive to

the airy interiors of the Roman buildings at Philippopolis, Odessos, Augusta Trajana, Escus and Nove.

Roman influence is felt in the Bulgarian basilicas, which usually had a nave and two aisles, or just a spacious nave. Their walls were built of massive blocks of stone, as at ancient Mycenae. For the interior decoration architects favoured



pilastered walls, columns and capitals, niches and alcoves and classic cornices. The ornamentation was not as elaborate as the one developed by Romanesque architecture, but contained some of the basic elements from which it evolved. The composition of the decorative stone reliefs was marked by an alternating rhythm of lively motifs (a rabbit cropping grass, a running dog, etc.) and ancient patterns of palmettos, ova and various floral motifs.

The art and architecture of the period shows the unbroken link with the traditions of an ancient past. This was an architectural and artistic trend in the life of a state resting on solid foundations and of a nation creating its religion and way of life which accredited Bulgaria to the community of the most civilized medieval states.

We have at this period fortresses and palaces, new types of cities with double concentric fortress walls and a citadel for the

ruler and his court. Bricks, which were commonly used by Byzantine architecture, were spurned by the first Bulgarian master builders. They seem to have thought them a too 'soft' material for the young but rugged nation which had to battle for a place under the sun. Elaborate stone cornices are indicative of a considerable level of artistic development. We see fine animal figures and animal heads, which later appeared in Romanesque and Gothic architecture when gargoyles became the fashionable spouts of roof gutters.

The pace of the Renaissance was not necessarily a smooth running process. In the Renaissance of the West, concrete socio-economic forces and the development of relations production consolidated the domination of the bourgeois class. In this case the development of spiritual and cultural life was a logical result. But for a number of historical reasons the emotional and spiritual principle outpaced the development of the forces of production. The impact of Simeon's reign (893-927) was felt in the flickering sparks of the Renaissance movement. In Bulgaria they took the form of profound interest in human character, the growing self-confidence of a nation which had formerly lacked its own script and writings in the spoken language of the people, broadening religious and worldly horizons and sustained interest in the wisdom and art of the ancients. This trend shaped its specific model, having a lot in common with all other 'sparks' of the revival movement, and a lot that was all its own.

The eminent Soviet scientist N.I. Conrad and other authors have sought a medievalization of the Renaissance – attributing the beginnings of the Renaissance to an earlier medieval period. We see a similar idea in Elie Faure's 'Histoire de l'art'. Engels noted that the medieval period should not be considered as an entirely dark age of human history, in view of the evident expansion of man's cultural activities, although they took more definite shape somewhat later, in the 14th and 15th centuries.

In spite of the broadening horizons of our modern world, by force of habit many scientists in the West still tend to overlook or underrate the contribution of the Slavonic community. This attitude towards the medieval culture of the Slavs is all the more

unjustifiable when we realize that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance cannot be considered as two isolated and hostile to each other developments. This is especially true of 9th and 10th century Bulgaria, where in spite of the power of the church and the flowery language of its writings, religious mysticism never prevailed over open, critical and logical thought. In his book 'West and East', published in 1966, Conrad rightly notes that the elements of the Renaissance did not necessarily develop in other countries in the spheres in which they developed in the first Renaissance country (Italy).

We find Renaissance elements in Bulgaria's Golden Age during Simeon's reign late in the ninth century, appearing in many spheres and forms.

Preslav and Ochrid, scholastic and architectural developments; books with the finest illuminations, and graceful pottery – these are only a few marks of this Golden Age, which has to be further studied for a realization of its full impact on future developments in Bulgaria and in the whole part of the ancient world.

CHAPTER V

Tsar Simeon and his capital at Great Preslav; parallel development of scholastic writings and plastic arts

Social upheavals often release a fresh thrust of creative energy and produce great works of art. The pent-up feelings of a nation helps it ride over the crest of the wave, leaving behind the past and looking towards new horizons in the realization of its historical mission. Counteracting forces focus on a kind of magnetic pole coil for a new spring forward.

The replacement of the matriarchate by the patriarchate created the tragedy of Orestes; when a ray of Renaissance enlightenment reached Elsinor, it wrested the Prince of Denmark from his passive contemplations; when the talented Russian poet

Alexander Blok abandoned his world of mystic women dressed in braid and silk and sought the symbol of a worldly Christ marching with the Red Army men, he too found himself on the crest of the wave of the Revolution.

In the development of Bulgarian creative thought, a similar process has been evidenced in Bulgaria's 1300 year-long history in the works of Constantine the Philosopher, Chernorizets Hrabr, Païssiy, Vazov, Smyrnenski, Vaptsarov...all associated with sharp turning points in Bulgarian history.

In old Bulgarian history we follow the development of art in the synthesis between architecture, painting and sculpture. This was not a mechanical association but an organic fusion, apparent in the building of impressive architectural and artistic ensembles, reflecting all aspects of the development of thought, social ideas and tendencies which shaped the structure of the social community.

Man was curious to define his place in Time and Space, the origin and meaning of birth, life and death. His quest for immortality assumed a more earthly ring as something more tangible than the immortality of the soul in the world beyond, and change of inert into living matter through reincarnation, which priests and mystics preached to be possible by the will of the Creator. When kings and emperors spurred the building of monumental architectural and decorative ensembles, they intended them to embody their 'eternal' prerogatives of sovereign power and grandeur of their dynasties, to materialize in artistic symbols their philosophy of life, of man and God. Sovereigns came and went but their monumental projects remained for posterity, imbued with the eclecticism we see in the cathedral at Burgos, in Spain, the mosque at Damascus, and in the grandeur of the Church of St Sophia in Istanbul.

New generations and new rulers wanting to perpetuate their power, seeking new ways and means of achieving it, were sometimes no better than ill-formed patches on an old and noble fabric. This is a kind of 'fourth dimension' in man's social development through the ages.

This is true of many towns, countries and architectural and artistic ensembles, but this was not the case with our oldest cities like Pliska, Preslav, and to a certain extent Veliko Turnovo. We

do not find in them 'fourth dimensional' social alluvia through the ages, because wars and adversities razed cities to the ground and made necessary an entirely fresh start.

Looking back on the world of our forefathers, we realize that artistic synthesis appears in periods of social progress as the expression of conscious or subconscious philosophical and es-



thetic thought. Without ever reaching the grandeur of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and Mycenae, we find in the oldest Bulgarian cities an impressive synthesis of architecture and art, sculptural and ceramic ornaments and decorative styles. We observe the step by step consolidation of the first Bulgarian state, and the creation of complete unity between Slavs and Bulgars in the test of strength against the mighty Byzantine Empire.

Marx has noted that man's stature is determined by the stature of his social relations. He believed all great people to have been closely linked with the mass of the people.

How well Marx's words apply to Simeon, the great scholar of the first Bulgarian state, Simeon the builder of Preslav, Simeon who stimulated the cultural development of his nation. This gives us the key to the complex interaction between outstanding spiritual and cultural values in the creation of a brilliant historical epoch. Simeon's versatile interests and activities make him an outstanding person and ruler of the medieval Bulgarians.

Scholastic and literary progress during the Golden Age of Tsar Simeon went parallel with the maturity of art, even though it lacked the brilliance of the intellectual and emotional Byzantine culture – the most advanced culture in the whole of Europe. For centuries Bulgarian art never abandoned its effort to break out of the ruts of established patterns, to follow



with a firm hand an independent line and shape a world view based on rational thought and scientific experience. Thus legend and realities shaped the epic urge for self-assertion in the process of historical development. Here is a text from an apocrypha.

‘And so Simeon built great cities along the coast, and he also built the great city of Preslav and there was crowned (to rule) over a state spreading from the city called Zvechan all the way to Thessalonica. He built Preslav in 28 years...’

When Simeon came to the throne in 893, Bulgaria was already a Christian state and the attempt to preserve its spiritual and ethnic identity created inevitable tensions with the older and materially and spiritually advanced civilization of Byzantium.

But while the building programmes of the Byzantine Empire in the 8th and 9th centuries reached the border of stagnation, the creative urge of the young Slav-Bulgarian state built Great

Preslav on the site of an old Slav settlement and military centre, as well as Bregalnitsa and Ohrid to the west, the city of Cherven, and many other cities in the Danubian and Dobroudja plains.

The old Bulgarian builders, stone-dressers, masons, sculptors, potters, painters and decorators had to decide what road to follow. Should they blindly imitate Byzantium? Or should they use the experience which the Bulgars gained in contacts with other peoples and civilizations?

While the heritage of the past continued to exist, Bulgarian builders, sculptors, potters, goldsmiths, calligraphers and decorators developed new forms and media of expression in the field of art, parallel with a critical appreciation of the new trends in other countries.

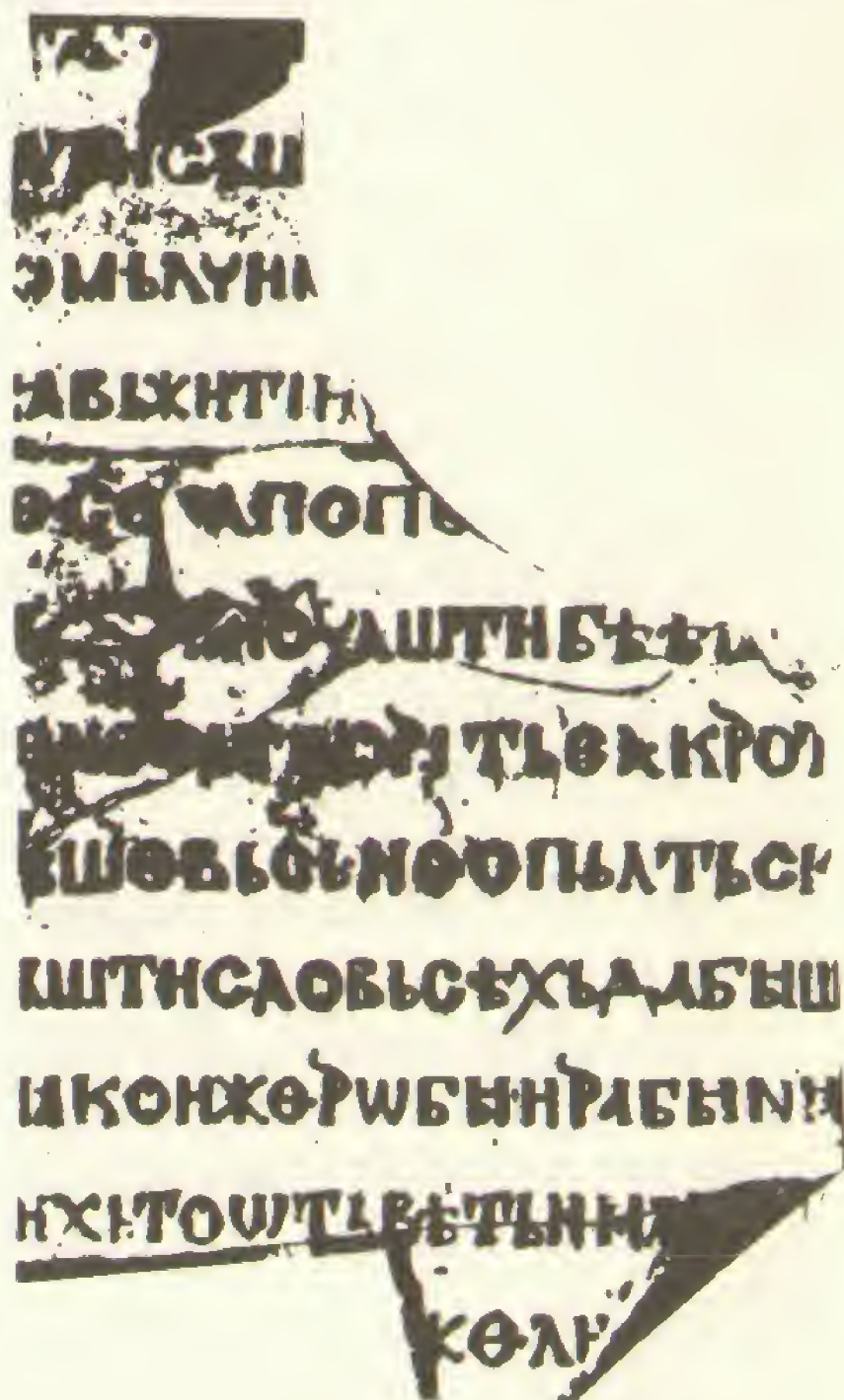
And so we gradually come to the composition of a Slavonic alphabet. Its graphic style was dignified and attractive. The Sofia Archeological Museum has in its collection a ceramic tile found in the workshop of the Round Church at Preslav. It is only 20 centimetres long and 11.5 cm wide, with an inscription in Cyrillic letters drawn with outstanding artistry. For all its value as an epigraphical monument, it is, above all, a work of art. The old master sought to create harmony between the lines and letters. Alternating thin and thick strokes of each letter and decorative connecting lines give the script an attractive slant to the right.

Archeologists are expecting other finds of this kind, because Preslav was a scholastic centre famous for its writings, translation and copied works. Letters were both the substance and ornament of thought and wisdom. The famous scholar of the period, Chernorizets (monk) Hrabr, noted that as the Roman and Greek alphabets had no letters for common Bulgarian phonetic sounds new letters had to be invented. Ornamental lettering and miniature illuminations were both a manifestation of the innate artistic talent of the old Bulgarians and their urge to create and leave for posterity a lasting symbol of the birth and development of the nation. Preslav is typical!

There are now only ruins of the eastern wall of the citadel, of the northern gate and of certain churches and palaces. From the accounts of travellers we learn that in the latter half of the 16th century the whole outer wall of the fortress was still intact. Jacob

Bognar, passing through Preslav in 1585, saw 'a fortress wall of white square blocks of stone'.

Preslav was built on the banks of the Ticha River and was protected by an outer wall and the wall of a citadel, which encompassed the palace compound and the basilica. The walls were faced with large blocks of hewn limestone. The outer wall was 3.25 metres thick and that of the citadel 2.80 metres.



Certain scholars believe Preslav to have been the first city in medieval Europe to have concentric outer and inner walls, which became normal practice in the fortification of feudal cities in the West. Preslav occupied a large area, but was destroyed by the Byzantine emperor John Tzimisces in 976. It regained its freedom for a time, but was in 1001 again stormed by Byzantium. The city rapidly declined during the 11th and 12th centuries until only a memory of its ancient splendor remained.

The palace buildings were in the centre of the citadel. Only a small part of the compound has been excavated so far: the large reception room, residential quarters and a small quest room. The palace was rectangular, built on a north/south axis and was over 30 metres long and more than 20 metres wide. It was in the form of a nave and two aisles, separated by a row of white marble columns. Yoan the Exarch notes that it had elaborate marble, copper, silver and gold ornaments. Adversities and negligence have left little of this brilliant ensemble, but even the fragments which archeologists discover all the time – columns, sculptured marbles, door frames, cornices, mosaic floors, painted ceramic facing tiles and stained glass windows – are indicative of the splendour of the architectural ensemble.

We find Byzantine animalistic ornaments, showing the influence of the East, intertwined with patterns of original design with a great feeling of harmony and proportion.

We still have only a vague idea of what the palace compound looked like, but one is inevitably impressed by the monumental art characterizing the reign of Simeon – symbolic of the remarkable development of scholastic and literary thought, architecture and decorative trends. Scholars and plastic artists left their mark on an era of emotional creative endeavour of the young nation.

Todor Duks was an eminent scholar and a cousin of Prince Simeon. In a note to translated works of the Byzantine writer Athanassius of Alexandria (which he had copied on the order of Simeon), he described the place where he worked as a court scribe:

‘...near the mouth of the Ticha River, in the year 6415/907, during the 14th Indiction, where the Prince had built the new Holy Golden Church...’

We now know the so-called Round, or Golden Church, to have been the most impressive building in outer Preslav. Its site is exactly as described by Todor Duks: where the Ticha River flows out of the Gerlovo Gorge into the Preslav plain. The first excavations in this area were started in 1927/28 by Yordan Gospodinov, a schoolmaster, and amateur archeologist, whose knowledge and dedication have enriched our knowledge of the ancient past of the Bulgarians.

The church was built in two stages: first the porch and rotunda and then the atrium and two round towers, whose doors were near the porch. The dome was supported by twelve columns and the church derived its name from the fact that it was gilt outside and decorated inside with mosaics against a gilt background. The porch was supported by four columns, whose pedestals have been preserved. The walls and floor of the church were of white marble with coloured mosaic compositions. The altar doors, pulpit and thrones in the niches were also of marble, with rich incrustations of glass paste, coloured or painted ceramic tiles and ornaments in bold relief.

This was something new in architecture in the Balkan lands, Byzantine architects built of brick and stone and used other decorative styles, while at Preslav even the cornices under the roof were of sculptured stone.

The Sofia Archeological Museum has capitals and stone statues from diggings in the area of the Preslav palace. The Preslav Museum has sculptured friezes, the lintel of the palace gate with palmetto ornaments and another lintel decorated with a griffin, a cubic capital, and other fragments of the original building. Certain finds have found their way to the museums at Veliko Turnovo, Shoumen and elsewhere.

Archeologists have unearthed enough to give a fairly comprehensive idea of the inventive spirit and building talent of the old Bulgarian architects and artists.

The walls of the palaces and churches were faced with huge slabs of sculptured stone. They were usually divided into squares, each one of which contained a symmetrical motif forming part of the general composition. Floral motifs were common: palmettos, vine and other leaves.

The capitals were cubiform, with round bases, and likewise decorated with vine and palmetto leaves. Sculptors have found that the old Bulgarian stone dressers used not only a chisel, but also a drill, forming part of a new technique of the period.

On a pilaster capital in the Sofia Archeological Museum we find the figure of an animal, on another a bird, on a third capital found at Nova Zagora – a phoenix with outspread wings and fan tail; on a fourth, at the same place, the figures of an unknown

animal and a griffin; on a capital at the Preslav Museum we see a rabbit nibbling at a bunch of grapes.

This was a style of art including both elements from life around and fanciful creatures from mythology. We notice a return to the antique capital, which was rather unusual at this period. Religious mysticism never sank deep roots. Nevertheless, stone dressers abandoned the motifs of pagan mythology which had been used for several centuries, and used animals and birds in symmetrical compositions. We see the figures of a lion, a dog



or a bird, often a peacock, and feel the influence of the East: a griffin attacking some animal or a phoenix rising out of the ashes – a symbol of the reincarnation of life from time immemorial.

Most of the finds in the Preslav Museum come from the site of the Round (or Golden) Church, and one of the great centres of learning seems to have been right by.

This explains the stylistic interaction between the world views and development trends of the scholars and sculptors and their common desire to give the truest possible portrayal of their artistic emotions.

We assume that the Bulgarian master-builders were familiar with the best specimens of late Hellenistic and Roman art, as both had left in the Bulgarian land monuments bearing the mark of highest professional artistry: tombstones, sarcophagi, portrait heads and decorative compositions.

Traditions hardly ever die without a trace, but in the case of Bulgaria they were refracted through the prism of a new national

awareness and Christian virtues, and the attempt to entrench them in the minds and hearts of the people while renouncing the pagan past. We observe the birth of new values of style reflecting realities of life, and the choice of motifs expressing the world view of the young nation. We see the development of an intentionally more rugged form of art, simple but monumental, imbued with great imagination, at times reviving antique forms, trying to find its way to a realm of art which later in Romanesque architecture appeared in hideous shapes, menacing



human frailty and all swerving from the path of the righteous.

It was an art trying to strike the right balance between human power and its glittering insignia on the basis of sober realities. This scholastic and literary art had a very earthly ring.

Konstantin Preslavski said in a sermon contained in his Apostolic Gospel: 'Our lot is not to loll in idleness, but to sharpen our wits, repel the deeds of Darkness and arm ourselves with the weapons of Light.'

Elsewhere he noted: 'Seek ye the learned books, for therein will ye find life eternal!'

This is the spirit in which the Bulgarians built their cities and palaces; not in an attempt to rival the splendour of Byzantium, but rather to create landmarks of their cultural development and establish their identity among the other nations of the medieval world.

We find at Pliska a symbol which was later often repeated in European heraldry and in the ornamental patterns of imperial

palaces, just as it was popular in palaces in the East and the palace gates of Mycenae.

The lion had long been a popular sculptural form in the Bulgarian lands. Stone lions were common at Preslav, but the most famous of them are those found at Stara Zagora, forming part of five slabs with some animal: a lion seen in profile, a lioness with her cub, peacocks on each side of a phiale,



two-headed eaglets, and a girl with flute. These are slabs of red sandstone and the bas-relief figures look more like stone paintings than sculptures. The artist evidently had the gift of graceful stylization.

This heraldic representation of animal life on stone lays emphasis on poise and movement. We do not find geometric or vegetal ornaments, crosses or monograms of Christ, which pervaded early and later Christian mosaic, sepulchral and sculptural art. It was never dominated by the established patterns of Christianity and the development of Bulgarian art never quite lost contact with the ancient pagan traditions...

At Patleina, on the right bank of the Ticha River and near the old Bulgarian capital, there was a monastery noted for its painted ceramics, of the kind used in the composition of the famous local icon of St Theodore.

A cemetery church with a nave and two aisles has been found on Delidushka Hill east of Preslav.

On the terraced ground in the Avradaka area east of the city archeologists have unearthed a monastery church with finely



moulded cornices, archivolt and three-dimensional animal heads.

An account of the finds in this area has been given by archeologist Vera Ivanova in the third volume of 'Diggings and Investigations', a collection of scientific articles published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In the foreword Nikola Mavrodinov (then Director of the Sofia Archeological Museum) notes that in the course of three years excavations had unearthed eight churches, four public buildings and a monastery. One of these articles, Vera Ivanova's 'Diggings at Avradaka in Preslav', gives illustrations of the heads of lionesses, of a monkey, and a

gargoyle ending in the head of a lioness.

We do not find animal head sculptures in Byzantine art of the period, and they appeared in the West much later in Romanesque sculpture. Bulgarian sculpture was noted for its well balanced volume and simple but expressive forms. Many of these sculptures were gargoyles placed at the corners of church gutters. These lions' heads with gaping mouths were not meant to strike fear in the hearts of the faithful from forces unknown, for the lions looked like the large and friendly dogs we find accompanying the effigies of the Thracian Horseman, or figuring on old tombstones. They were the symbol of strength and trust.

This was an epoch also marked by the revival of the ancient traditions of the goldsmiths' art. A hoard of gold and silver torques, bracelets, ear-rings and beads, found near the village of Shermet in Varna district, is now in the Sofia Archeological Museum. The workmanship of the jewels fits in with the description given by Yoan the Exarch of the regalia of the old Bulgarian sovereigns.

In the Preslav Museum we see silver torques, bronze bracelets, ear-rings and pendants, metal amulets, belt buckles, metal seals with the images of animals and others. It is evident that they were made by gold and silversmiths in well appointed workshops.

A few words about the old Bulgarian potters. The traditions of the Neolith, of the Greek colonies and city states along the Black Sea coast, of the Thracians and Romans gradually lapsed into a rugged monumental style which curbed the emotional aspect of the potters' art. Some of their compositions were influenced by the versatility of the ancient Greek Black and Red Figure, while others were remindful of the graceful vessels of the Nagy St Miklos gold treasure. The potters often reproduced the forms of metal vessels, which ordinary people could not afford. But expensive pottery was also produced for the nobility and clergy.

On hundreds of fragments of painted pottery in the Preslav Museum we see graceful birds, palmettos, the eyes and lips of ascetic human faces, eye-spots of peacock trains and various floral motifs. Totyu Totev, an expert on Old Bulgarian art, who has worked at Preslav for years, showed me some time ago what

he thought were scrapped tiles of iconographic compositions, found on the site of one of the numerous potters' shops at Preslav. The expressive reproduction of faces, figures and landscapes gave them an extraordinary touch of realism.

The painted and glazed tile icon of St Theodore Stratelates is a remarkable creation, in which Christian elements prevailed over traditional pagan influences. We see the image of a recluse monk with mystic eyes. On twenty painted tiles the unknown master of the Bulgarian school of art of the period created a life-like psychological portrait of the venerated saint.

Though seemingly carried away by his thoughts to the world beyond, the saint is not unsensitive to the problems of man. The brilliance of the royal court and the monumental churches and palaces, the development of sculpture and scholastic centres did not blind the eyes of the saint to the hard life of the commoners, of the peasants and soldiers.

In his description of Simeon's palace and royal court Yoan the Exarch notes that travellers coming from afar were so awe-struck by their size and splendour that they had no words to describe them on their return. They were poor people who had never seen anything like it and their vocabulary was limited to the drab and difficult life they led in the process of social stratification, as the feudal system took definite shape.

But these common people, workers, soldiers or hired hands, also played an important role in the development of art. We see the evidence in numerous drawings which they made on marble and stone with a sharp chisel. Skorpil, Rafaïl Popov and V. Minov have found many other specimens of popular bas-relief art at Pliska, Madara, at the village of Cherven in Roussé district, and elsewhere.

In 1949 L.Ognenova found a number of such 'stone paintings' at Preslav. Other finds in recent years have helped us form a picture of the dress, way of life and environment of the old Bulgars. They also show phases in the development of art – at first rather primitive and schematic, not bound by any particular set of graphic rules. Nevertheless, it was an emotional style of art, by which the common people left a record of events they thought should be remembered. They were often hunting scenes. For centuries horsemen trotted to the right, but when artists

began using the new palaces and fortress walls as a background of their compositions, we find their horsemen moving to the left. They wear long trousers and carry a spear, from whose tip often flutters a flag. The ornaments include straight or undulating lines, crosses, and sometimes an eagle.

Other compositions tell the tale of famous battles, in which horsemen chase the fleeing foe.

Yet another group show peaceful scenes of peasant life, and in one case a ship.

Some of these stone paintings are remindful of the earliest forms of human art. Regardless of the progress made by what probably were professional stone dressers, sculptors and engravers, art was continuously revitalized by the esthetic urge of the common people to express events, thoughts and emotions. Atavism may be one good reason explaining our interest in children's drawings. The common people left a record of their observations and spontaneous feelings, which they must have thought would be of interest to posterity. The hesitant stroke of the chisel has produced primitive compositions, but they have rhythm, portray the natural gait of horse and rider. The figures are well spaced and their dramatic charge stirs our imagination to create its own image of the life of these simple peasants, soldiers and cattle breeders whose ethnic identity and national spirit later survived the adversities of long centuries of alien rule.

Now let us say more about the written culture of the Bulgarians, which by this time had asserted its position as an enlightened witness of the fate of the people, as a champion and herald of Slavonic culture, which has helped make us what we are today.

CHAPTER VI

Books as a record of the civic virtues, humanistic trends and artistic merits of the Bulgarians through the centuries

During the 168- year period of Byzantine domination, many valuable Bulgarian manuscripts were destroyed, just as

Christianization had led to the destruction of most of the Old Bulgar and pagan monuments. Furthermore, after the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans the new rulers used the deserted Pliska and Preslav as stone quarries providing dressed building materials.

We have thus lost the dispatch of Prince Boris to the Pope in Rome, and his questions of 866, on which Pope Nicholas I based his 'Reply to the Bulgarians'.



But some of these old writings have been preserved. In Rome Anasthassius the Librarian was a personal friend of Constantine (Cyril) the Philosopher. We now know that it was he who inspired the writing of 'Italian Legend', containing an interesting account about the composer of the Cyrillic alphabet and the lifework of Cyril and Methodius.

A Latin manuscript at the town of Cividale in northern Italy was studied years ago by Yordan Ivanov and just recently by Professor Ivan Dujcev. In this text of the Gospel we find the names of the emissaries of Prince Boris on their way to Rome.

They obviously wanted to leave a record of their historic mission.

These are but two of many examples showing how the young Bulgarian state gradually took its place among the countries of the medieval world, and among its dominating churches. This was an epoch of cultural contacts, of political, philosophical and theological disputes, and of a trend which may be summed up in the writings of the eminent scholar Chernorizets Hrabr, arguing that the trilingual dogma of religious worship should acknowledge the development of the Bulgarian and Slavonic literary and religious presence on an equal footing.

In his book 'East and West' the eminent Soviet historian N. Conrad notes: 'History shows that the Renaissance is a movement riding on the crest of a high wave sweeping over the Eurasian continent. Or rather, the Afro-Asian continent, as in remote antiquity North Africa and the European and Asian countries of the Mediterranean basin formed a historically united whole. This movement started in the 8th century from the eastern end of the Eurasian continent, from the shores of the Pacific Ocean, to end in the 17th century in the West, on the shores of the Atlantic.'

This pattern makes it possible to locate the beginning of our own Renaissance – in the tenth century. This was the threshold which the Bulgarians crossed to find their place in the world, the threshold between ignorance and learning, between Bulgaria and Byzantium, Bulgaria and Rome, between man's natural environment and his endeavour to create greater harmony and new cultural and spiritual values.

These dialectical links, with a touch of religious spirit, were at the same time the fruit of deep philosophical thought probing the gap between scholastic books and the dictates of reason in the quest of real truth and wisdom. The Alphabetical Prayer and Prologue to the Gospel may have been written by one and the same person, undoubtedly one with poetic talent, perhaps by Cyril himself. We do not know, but important, above all, is this poetry as a programme revealing a strong awareness of the ethnic identity of the Bulgarian people, their spiritual orientation, and their daring to face the world without fear, confusion or inferiority complex.

To quote a concrete passage:

'Hear now, you of the Slav nations,
Hear the Word that has come from God,
The Word, which succors the soul of man,
The Word, which fortifies our hearts and minds,
The Word, which guides our steps to God...'

This Logos, showing the way to God, should be interpreted in the context of this early period in which the national awareness of the Bulgarians was formed. But this shell had a more than religious content.

The philosophical and social message of this Logos is apparent from a latter passage:

'As without light nothing may gladden the eye,
Which contemplates the world around,
So will the illiterate soul never feel
The joy and beauty of Creation.'

This is a selective esthetic approach to the beauty of nature, but the critical analysis of the human eye also includes an appraisal of the immaterial world: the beauty of clear thinking, interpretation of social and natural phenomena, emotional responses to brilliant writing and oratory...

The Bulgarians had worked their way to the watershed, to the Great Divide between the old theological view of man as God's creation and humble servant of the Church, and the worldly philosophy abandoning the ruts of Roman, Byzantine and Mediterranean traditions and ascetic dogmas of the Orthodox Church and asserting the personality and importance of Man in the development of the human society. This spark of cultural enlightenment, which may be thought of as an Early Renaissance, was often dimmed by historical adversities (periods of Greek and Ottoman rule), but was kept alive in the transition from one epoch to another and its embers were never extinguished.

The eminent historian of Bulgarian literature, Peter Dinekov, said in a monograph on the continuity of Bulgarian culture through a period of one thousand years: 'This cultural cohesion

was manifested, above all, in the uninterrupted links between the various epochs and the presence of lasting phenomena which became clearly defined national symbols.' He mentioned as a typical example the lifework of Cyril and Methodius, which was woven into the fabric of our national culture and determined the destinies of the Bulgarian people. The building up of a national literary tradition can be followed from the earliest inscriptions



found of the old Bulgars to the poetry of the greatest Bulgarian poet, Hristo Botev. Peter Dinekov has made a detailed study of this process of continuity in culture and art.

But this Logos appears in a great variety of forms: in ancient inscriptions, monumental sculpture, folklore maintaining the traditions of creative thought, and its expression in the fine and decorative arts noted for their esthetic refinement and emotional treatment of subjects.

This versatile continuity in the course of more than one thousand years cannot be adequately portrayed by the descriptive method alone. Out of facts and traditions we have to deduce underlying trends and systems with a certain amount of precision.

LOGOS. The Svetoslav (or Simeon) Miscellany is an encyclopaedic collection of Byzantine religious literature (385 texts of 30 Byzantine writers), translated and adapted by Old Bulgarian scholars. This is a return to the works of the ancient philosophers, often mixed with theological deliberations, characteristic of a period in which the presence of God had to be noted in each cell of nature, in every movement and every living thing. We see definitions and interpretations of substance, mind and matter, nature and its properties, the hand of destiny, quantity and quality, of what is concrete and what abstract, Being and Non-Being, harmonies and disharmonies etc.

It is apparent that some of these treaties are borrowed from St John Chrysostom, St Basil of Caesarea (the Great), and from a book by the free-thinking Bishop Theodore of Harran. An analysis of the writings during the reign of Simeon show that the scholastic works were not hard and dry postulates or interpretation of the religious categories of Christianity. We find in them many worldly and even heretical conceptions and a return to the natural philosophy of Aristotle.

The development of a free scholastic thought did not come about as a sudden Revelation, but was the product of the critical and esthetic conceptions formed in the course of centuries – all seeking the truth about man, nature and the future. Simeon's Miscellanea explains in verse how they were compiled:

The greatest among all kings,
Simeon, the mighty sovereign ruler,
Yearning to reveal the thoughts
Hidden in the learned books,
As interpreted by the Great Basil,
Charged me, his humble servant,
To change the vernacular
But state his thoughts with utmost precision.

This gives an idea of the duty and art of the translator. The Miscellanea are qualified as a 'learned' book and the said

philosophical categories were obviously intended for educated persons. The 'change of the vernacular' was not merely a translation of Greek texts into Bulgarian; it involved the creation of a terminology in the Old Bulgarian language, able to express all the subtle shades and meanings of philosophical thought 'with utmost precision'.

The development of the Bulgarian language in the field of philosophical abstractions is apparent in the polemic writings of the monk Chernorizets Hrabr, and in the part of the Panonian Legends, which describes the dispute between Cyril the Philosopher and the foreign scholars who upheld the trilingual dogma that God should be worshipped and church books written and read only in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

Cyril argued: 'Does not the rain from the heavens fall upon us all in equal measure? And does not the sun shine for all? Do not we all breathe the same air? Have you no feeling of shame to acknowledge only three languages, thus wanting to keep all other tribes and nations blind and deaf? Tell me, do you believe God to be helpless to bestow these blessings (of learning) or biased — giving learning to some and denying it to others? We know of many other peoples who are able to read books and to praise the Lord in their own tongues, such as...'

This resulted in the tacit understanding that the Bulgarians could translate the sacred books into their language marking the start of its literary development in the next millennium to the fiery language of the revolution, the songs sung at the barricades and the opening of new horizons. The impetus of the literary movement during the Golden Age of Boris and Simeon shattered the inferiority complex which had for centuries oppressed the Thracian tribes in the Bulgarian lands. Later, and particularly since the monk Païssiy (one of the leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival movement in the 18th century) published his Slav-Bulgarian History, we find the same urge of the Bulgarian people, during the period of Ottoman rule, to stimulate free thought, to broaden their literary and cultural horizons and prove worthy of an equal place among the European nations.

An article in *Le Monde* from the days when UNESCO commemorated the 1100th anniversary of Constantine-Cyril the

Philosopher reminds us that church books were translated into Church Slavonic several centuries before the European nations rose against the trilingual dogma and started literary traditions in their own vernacular.



To give but a few examples:

At the end of the twelfth century Pope Innocent III ordered the public burning of a translation of the Gospel into old French.

It was only in the fourteenth century that John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English.

In the fifteenth century John Huss preached his first sermon in the Czech language.

Only in the sixteenth century did Martin Luther translate the Bible into German...

Georgi Dimitrov had all this in mind when he defended the honour and dignity of the Bulgarian people at the historical Leipzig Fire Trial. It was an astonishing fact that while Latin, Hebrew and Greek were known to and used by only a few persons of the upper feudal class, Cyril and Methodius imposed the use in literature and religion of the common language spoken by the people. This stimulated their creative talents. While inevitably feeling the influence of several other centres of ancient and medieval civilizations, Bulgarian scholars, writers and political leaders preserved the basic elements of their cultural heritage.

During the lifetime of Constantine—Cyril the Philosopher and his brother Methodius from Thessalonica, where 'All Thessalonians spoke a pure Slavonic language', the Byzantine civilization was more advanced than all others on the continent of Europe. While the two brothers spread the religious teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church, they also laid the foundations for a dynamically developing Slavonic civilization which in many respects rivalled that of Byzantium.

Old Bulgarian literature laid emphasis on matters of the spirit and high moral principles. Scholastic occupations were considered as a mark of outstanding distinction in the humanistic development of Bulgarian culture. We find in it the first sprouts of a Renaissance conception of man and the aims and bounds of human knowledge. Dmitrii Likhachov, an eminent Soviet literary historian and keen observer, notes that Old Bulgarian literature used the centuries-old multinational Byzantine civilization to reach philosophical maturity by making their own original contributions. He calls our attention to the fact that for the old Bulgarian writers and scholars Bulgaria was a part of the great family of nations and that their works were of direct and outstanding significance to the entire Slavonic community. Their works were not only addressed to Bulgarian readers, but to the peoples of all countries where the Slavonic language was read and spoken.

Likhachov has analysed numerous old Slavonic writings and works of art, including Old Bulgarian monuments. His books 'Man in the Literature of Old Russia' (Moscow, 1970) and the second revised edition of his 'Poetry in Old Russian Literature' (Leningrad, 1971), as well as numerous monographs and articles, point out the high artistic merits of Old Slavonic and Old Bulgarian writings, forming the basis of literary and scientific progress. He explains the rapid literary development of the ninth and tenth century Bulgaria during the reign of Boris and Simeon. The core is rooted in the ancient past of a land situated on crossroads feeling the interaction of ancient civilizations and great migrations.

The Old Bulgarian writers shaped their national culture by translating ancient religious and philosophical books, Byzantine chronicles and abridged accounts of the works of Aristotle and

other great thinkers of the past. The historical mission of these writers and translators was to instil a high standard of morality in the Bulgarian people in their current and future development. While expressing the true poetic or philosophical idea of the original works, they emphasized in the translation ideas which would enrich and broaden the world view of the medieval Bulgarians and would create an intellectual contact with the cultural developments of other nations.

They had no reason to imagine that some day philosophers in the West would suggest the theory of 'impenetrability' (Spengler) between philosophy and literature. The Bulgarian translators sought the most effective and convincing way of conveying foreign thoughts in the Bulgarian vernacular and of creating of the outside world an image reflected through the prism of the kaleidoscopic character of the nation.

They had no problems translating the wisdom of the ancient world into the language of a young nation whose literature was in the process of formation. They were certain of their ability to translate into their native tongue the most intricate philosophical postulates and deliberations. The Old Bulgarian scholars and writers overcame the barrier of impenetrability, which baffled the minds of decadent philosophers thirteen centuries later. While seeking precision in their translation of the best known philosophical and theological writings, they showed that a translator cannot convey someone else's thoughts and observations without making his own presence felt; nor describe in his vernacular some foreign phenomenon without its subconscious association with the destiny, temperament and outlook of his people.

Language has never been an absolutely impartial analyser of human reason and emotion. Sometimes the exact sense which an author wishes to convey slips out of the grasp of the translator, but very often in his vernacular the thought appears in a new dimension which carries an even deeper meaning. Precision assumes a creative touch and hermetically capped ideas are given a broader national meaning.

The works of the Old Bulgarians portray the character and problems of individuals, in spite of the domination of the church and of the feudal order in the life of the country. Medieval writers

were familiar with the language, customs and traditions of the works which they translated. But they used a subjective approach as a source of new wisdom and conviction. The free thought and irony apparent in their writings show the reincarnation of the old cultural traditions, refusal to slave to the established patterns of foreign thought, or its modification so as to give it a typically Bulgarian utilitarian ring.



In the Old Bulgarian translations it is often difficult to judge to what extent the translators have reproduced the thoughts of foreign authors, and how much they have added of their own pathos. The translators were thinkers and writers and foreign works which they translated usually formed the framework within which they introduced elements of truth, as they saw it. This group of literature is imbued with no little national romanticism, which we observe in the 'Prologue' and 'On Letters.'

The authors clearly show their appreciation of the wisdom of others and feel proud that the Bulgarian language was rich enough to convey all the subtleties of the ideas of foreign thinkers. When popularizing foreign cultures in Bulgarian, they evolved new values which might convey the impression that the books were written to mark specific epoch in the literary development of Bulgaria.

We observe a similar trend during the National Revival period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here again our

writers and translators felt no gap between outstanding cultural achievements and the vocabulary and style for their translation into Bulgarian. This is a continuity of the cultural development of the nation from the period of the Second Bulgarian State in the 12th to the 14th centuries, surfacing again during the National Revival in the 18th and 19th centuries, gaining momentum since Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878, and centering again on the humanitarian aspects of society, on the problems of man and the future of mankind.

Another genre of Old Bulgarian literature was also imbued with great creative energy. We have in mind the *Vitae* of saints and high church dignitaries.

What are the popular *Lives of Saints*?

We usually have an idealization of a saintly person, without an adequate explanation of how he travelled the road to the realm of the spirit, or how he triumphed over temptation and the frailties of common mortals. But the mark of destiny was inevitably there. For instance, it is said that when Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher was born and given to a nanny, he refused to be nursed by another breast than his own mother's. This was interpreted as a sign of Providence – the young vine should be suckled from the sap of a noble root!

The description of a saint followed an iconographic pattern because he was not a common mortal. From his very conception he was meant to live in another world. He might be an ordinary shepherd resisting the temptation of the Evil One and thus discovering himself or drawing the attention of his near ones to his saintly character. He thus passed into the realm of the spirit. This was the case with St Ivan Rilski, who sought the seclusion of the Rila Mountains to communicate with God, and whose presence or touch wrought miracles on the sick and needy.

Medieval literary historians noted the static existence of man and the universe, both created and ruled by the Divine Power. A.Y.Gourevich has noted that the problem of the psychology of the individual or the historical explanation of society and the universe did not arise. In both literature and art established iconographic norms replaced life-like portraits of saintly persons. They are portrayed isolated from their natural and social environment.

Professor P.M.Bicilli once remarked that medieval man feared to make a show of his original self. But while this was generally the case in the development of art and literature, the vitality of the young Slav-Bulgarian state reached out and explored the realities of life.

In Bulgaria saints were, naturally, the servants of God. But they were, above all, remembered for the accomplishment of some historical and useful mission. They were not recluse monks hiding in virgin forests or deep caves and there pondering on the miracle of the 'world without end'; they were always in the midst of events and movements which made history. St Kliment's biographer described how the Franks persecuted 'with perfidy and mercenary intent' those who propagated the Slavonic script. He interpreted their misfortunes as a sign that the disciples of Cyril and Methodius – Kliment, Naum and Angelari – should seek the only place where their scholastic, pedagogical and religious work would be possible – in Bulgaria.

'...and so the Christian missionaries thought of Bulgaria and travelled there, trusting that in Bulgaria they would find salvation.'

In the *Vitae* of Cyril and Methodius, Kliment and other saints, up to Ivan Rilski, the historical background and civic virtues predominate over accounts of birth, upbringing, God's blessing and theological communion with the divine. Through the thin veil of religious mysticism we get a clear picture of individuals who played a very important role in the life and history of the nation. They are 'saintly' persons because of concrete deeds, as social leaders. We have the traditional description of what food the saint ate, how long he fasted, of the marital relations of the saint in his youth or those of his parents, where he had travelled, when and where he said his prayers. Most *Vitae* give similar information, but they all differ with regard to what the saints did when living among their fellow men. The account of the life of Constantine the Philosopher differs from that of Kliment; that of Ivan Rilski from the life of Patriarch Evtimi. All are portrayed against the historical and political background of the epoch in which they lived and gained distinction.

Here are some of the more important *Vitae* in Old Bulgarian literature: *Vita Constantini*, and particularly Chapter XVI con-

taining his brilliant defence of the Slavonic script. Vita Methodii, from which we learn that though Methodius was charged by the Byzantine court to propagate the influence of the Byzantine church and empire, Methodius committed himself to the advancement of the Slavonic language and letters; two Vitae of St Naum tell us that he built in 905 on the Lake of Ohrid a large religious centre and a church named after the Archangel Michael and the whole heavenly host. The pious Tsar Boris and his son, Tsar Simeon, provided the funds; the Miracle of St George and the Bulgarian, 'written in the language of the enlightened Bulgarian tribe; the Legend of Thessalonica, in which Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher notes that he wrote an alphabet of thirty-two letters for the Bulgarians. He adds that though he did not teach much, the Bulgarians were quick to learn; Isaiah's Vision, and certain others.

We should also take into account Constantine's poetry, his Prologue to the Gospel, and the Alphabetical Prayer; the polemic article by Chernorizets Hrabr 'On Letters', Presbyter Cosma's Lectionary, Yoan the Exarch's 'Hexameron', Tsar Simeon's letters, and numerous eulogies, chronicles and other documents.

Many of these works have appeared in academic publications in Bulgaria, the Soviet Union, Germany and other countries. A brief bibliography at the end of this book lists certain popular books and anthologies which will acquaint readers with all that is best in Old Bulgarian literature.

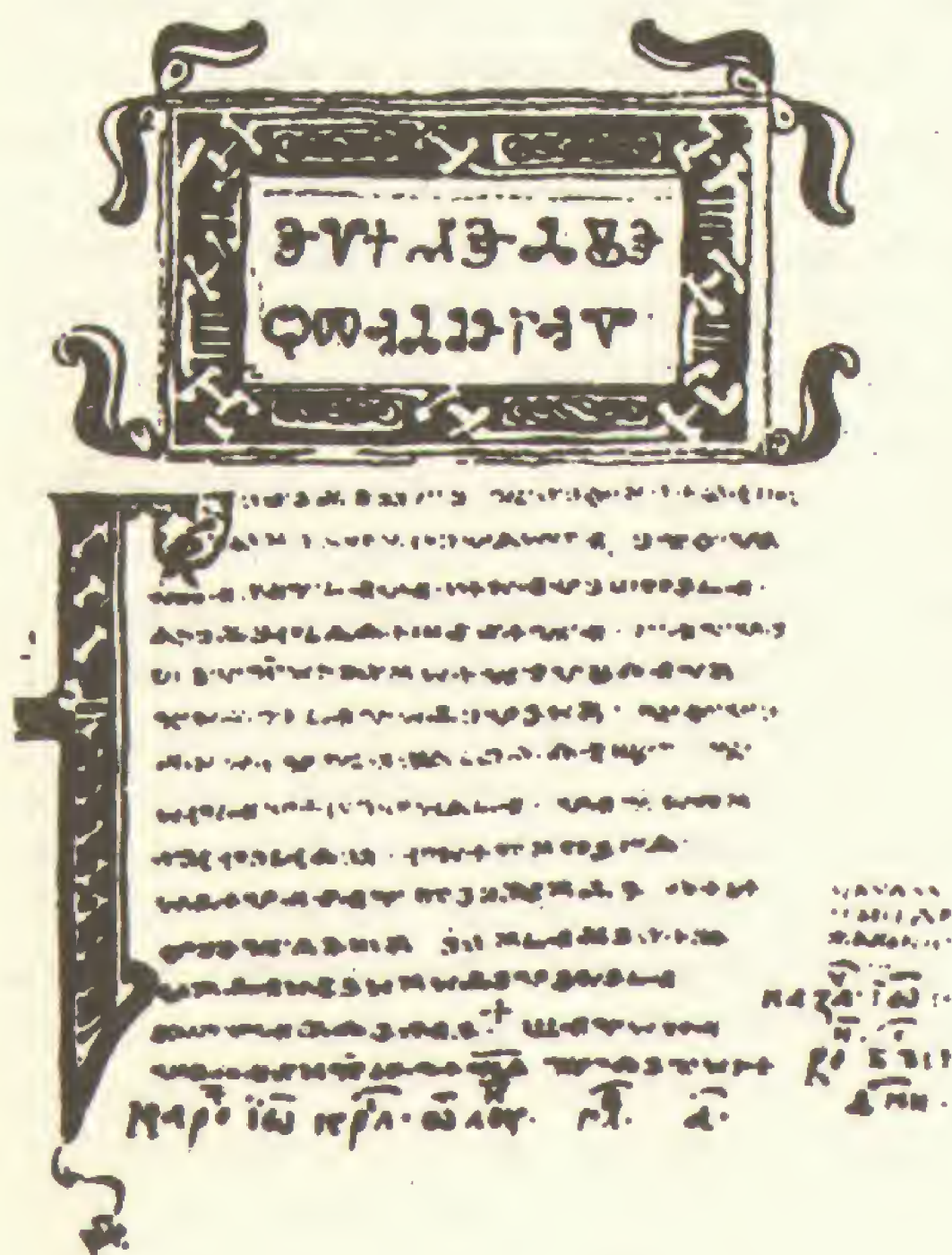
CHAPTER VII

The Old Bulgarian illumination artists and their world of geometric plaiting, landscapes and human figures

The Bulgarians gradually built up a literary tradition which in many ways went far beyond the bounds of scholasticism and religion and placed the aureole on historical personalities. Writers liked to have their books illuminated by intricate

patterns of plaiting, stylized elements of nature, geometrical patterns, human figures and descriptive compositions.

Yoan the Exarch noted in his Hexameron: 'If some poor travelling peasant has never seen the Prince in his mantle woven with gold, a golden chain round his neck, with a purple girdle for his golden sword, and happens to see his portrait painted with



these dazzling regalia, he will stop and wonder how the Prince would look in real life when even his portrait defies description.'

This shows that church decorators often used an earthly theme — the figure of the Prince. Most of the church paintings of this period have unfortunately been lost or destroyed, and we have only fragments of painted ceramic work with the images of saints and animals, and the portrait of St Theodore Stratelates to give us an idea of the style of art prevalent during this period.

Miniature painting as part of the illumination technique or on its own merits is another source, giving an idea about the development of Old Bulgarian art. Sometimes miniature artists used Byzantine models, but many (such as the Bologna and Radomir psalters, mentioned by Elena Kotseva) show a logical connection with the illumination of manuscripts from the first and the second Bulgarian states.

The earliest manuscripts in the Glagolitic script are from the second half of the tenth century. The Asemani and Zograph Gospels had fine miniature illuminations, stylish initial letters and other multicoloured ornaments. In the thirteenth century Dobreisha Gospel, Obrel psalter and Turnovo Gospel we see human portraits, plaiting and fanciful teratological compositions. In the fourteenth century Sofia Psalter, Manasses' Chronicle, the Vatican copy of 1345/6, Ivan Alexander's Gospel of 1356 (now in the British Museum), the Buhovo Gospel of 1567 and the Rila Lectionary of the seventeenth century we find the images of Church Fathers, the portrayal of historical events, landscapes and decorative patterns, showing the continuity of the Bulgarian fine and decorative arts through the ages. Nearly three hundred illuminated manuscripts have been found so far and scholars are now trying to classify them and determine the various stages in the development of Bulgarian art. But they all agree that the fine workmanship of these Bulgarian miniatures is the result of the artistic traditions of many generations. The sparing stroke of the brush gives the compositions rhythm and individualizes the features of the person portrayed against a tasteful ornamental background. In miniature painting it is often difficult to draw the difference between the work of an artist and that of a decorator or calligrapher. Bulgarian illuminations have elements of both monumental and miniature painting. Experts give as typical examples of this type of art famous manuscripts: the fourteenth century mural paintings at Ivanovo, the decoration of the chapel in Hreljo's tower at Rila Monastery, and the paintings in the Turzhitsa church of the sixteenth century.

Certain richly illuminated manuscripts are indicative of the quality of the monumental artists and portraitists of the Golden Age of Tsar Simeon. There is a twelfth century Russian copy of Constantine Preslavski's Gospel of 893/94. We find there the

miniature portrait of Prince Boris, evidently copied from an earlier Bulgarian original. In various other Russian copies we find reproductions of Bulgarian Golden Age originals.

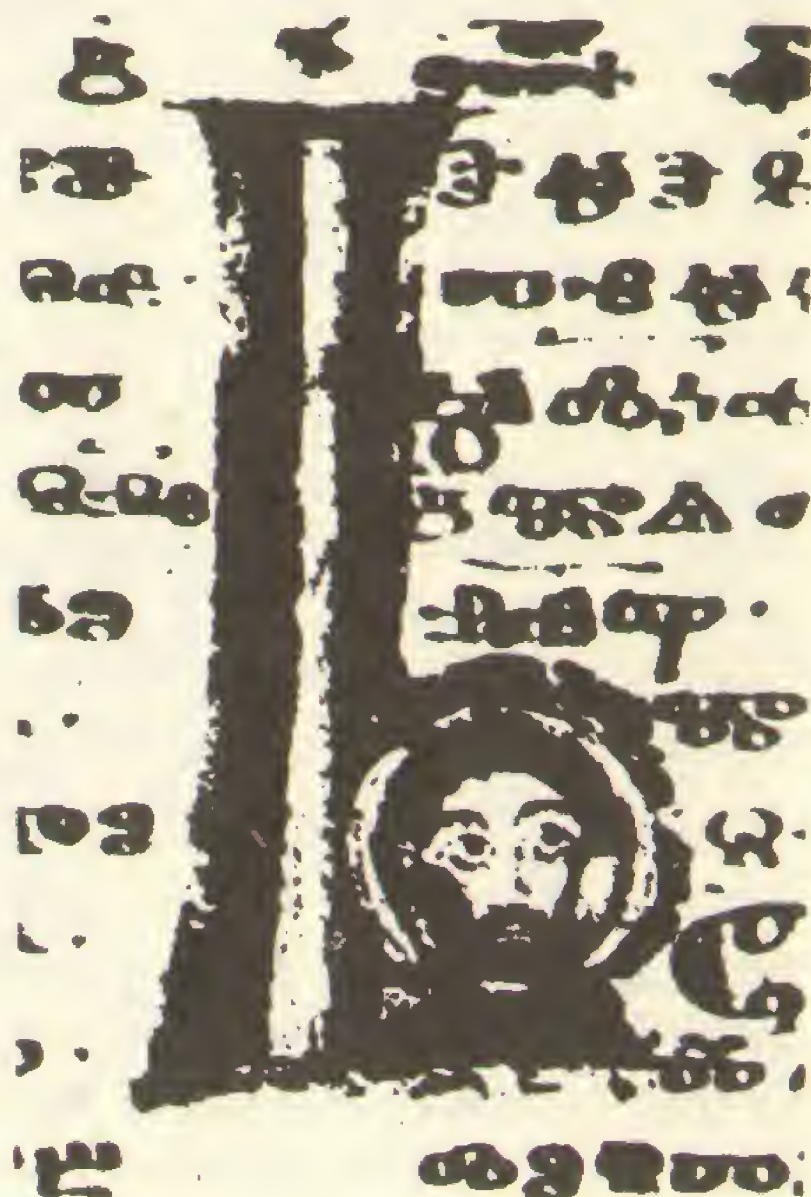
Illuminators were artists with an established profession, whose work was strongly influenced by the style of monumental art.



Recently the eminent Bulgarian historian of art Atanas Bozhkov published the miniatures illuminating the manuscript of the eleventh century Byzantine chronicler John Scylitzes (now in the National Library in Madrid). We do not know the names of the illuminators, but they are very important because of their association with events which took place in Byzantium from 811 to 1057 and show the important role which Bulgaria played in the history of the Byzantine empire. Four groups of miniatures describe victories of Tsar Simeon, three others battles in which

he suffered defeat, five illustrate his diplomatic activities, and one describes the parley and reception during this siege of Constantinople.

Atanas Bozhkov points out that the great number of Byzantine miniatures depicting the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon is in itself indicative of the power and status of the Bulgarian sovereign, who was treated by the Byzantine basileus as his equal.



It is certain that miniature art developed in Bulgaria earlier, before it was applied to the manuscripts which have been preserved in libraries in London, Madrid, Leningrad, and in Bulgaria.

There were schools of art at Preslav and Ohrid, and many manuscripts which they illuminated were sent to Russia and other countries.

Vera Ivanova-Mavrodinova, an expert on Bulgarian miniature art, rightly notes that the artistic presentation of a manuscript in those days was just as important as the substance of its text. There had to be proper balance between the written part of a page and the margins left for decoration. There was a

certain style for initial letters, a vignette at the head and at the end of each chapter, or page. The figural illustration had to be related to and harmonize with the text and often formed the background of the text or appeared in the margins. Illuminations often included the portraits of the person for whom the manuscript was intended, or on whose order it was made.

Illuminators were proud of their work both as artists and as historians leaving a visual record of outstanding personalities and events in which we often discover aspects of their personal views. The portraits of the Evangelists in the Ostromir and Mstislav Gospels are individualized and, regardless of their traditional pose with hands raised towards the heavens, we are impressed by the psychological insight shown by the miniature painter. He used in his illuminations the palmettos common in eastern decorative art, the famous lotus flower of the Egyptians, as well as plants and flowers growing locally and wove them into stylized geometrical compositions. We again observe a genetic continuity, as geometrical ornaments were a quite highly developed form of art in the Neolith.

Artists often painted birds, like the ones we find on Roman mosaics in northern Africa: peacocks, pheasants, guineahens. In the illustrations of Simeon's Miscellenea we also see these beautiful and gaily-coloured birds. Vera Ivanova again reminds us that in Preslav and Ohrid writers and artists were evidently in touch and familiar with the literary and artistic trends in the civilized world of the period, and its problems.

In one of her articles on the Old Bulgarian Glagolitic manuscripts, Vera Ivanova notes that the great variety of decorative patterns observed in Old Bulgarian literature is indicative of the freedom of choice of styles and subjects, which characterizes the pre- or Early Romance period in medieval Europe. The same freedom is apparent in the development of architecture and sculpture.

While we may admire the intricate decoration of these manuscripts, their intertwined palmettos, vine-leaves, stylized birds and animals and fanciful geometrical compositions, they are above all remarkable for the treatment of the human figure.

We see large initial letters in the forms of miniature medallions featuring ascetic saints with a mystic look in which hope in a better world beyond mingles with despair of the evils man encounters in his life span on the terrestrial globe. In the style and composition of Old Bulgarian miniature painting one



feels influences from the proximate or more distant east and south. The strictly established Byzantine pattern is absent, or appears in transformations marked by the quest of new media of expression, new tastes and original trends of development.

This look at Bulgarian art through the ages shows how it was enriched during the various stages and periods of its development. A journey through the span of centuries in the Bulgarian lands and museums reveals new sources of beauty and leads to fascinating discoveries.

CHAPTER VIII

An attempt to align the concepts of time and space, of romanticism and veracity in Old Bulgarian art and literature

Experts have the urge to lock in specific years and places the architecture, painted pottery, seals, household vessels and other finds in the Preslav area. But there is a parallel process of abstracting the Bulgarian arts and crafts from fixed dates and localities and considering them in the light of numerous forms of interaction between East and West in the course of centuries, which gave birth to a creative maturity in man's social and artistic development.

Modern physics shows the flows of energy to have an atomic structure. They are not like continuous jets of water, but like infinite droplets of rain. These micro-particles have no precise positions or speeds. Heisenberg's discovery has thus shown the two basic principles of the microcosm: quantum and indeterminate. Scientists have said that every law of nature is a limitation of its versatility. But there must be some form of law and order for the selection of what we call an optimum.

The same is true of art.

Here, too, we observe a process of law making or, rather, the establishment of certain law-governed esthetic trends which we qualify as norms. They constitute certain specific values and no matter what changes might take place, certain constants will always remain, which shape the look of art in each historic period.

Of course, these physical analogies are only approximations but they show the versatility of art. Regardless of all foreign influences, an art with a spiritual charge is bound to assume an original form and shape. We find this to have been true of the development of Byzantium when it was at its zenith.

A drawing of primitive man in the Altamir Cave depicts a fierce combat between a bull and a wild boar. Twelve thousand years ago the Paleolithic artist drew the boar with two pairs of hooves, slightly parted. This makes us think of a photographer superimposing two shots to make a scene more impressive.

This was the written language of a period when there was no alphabet, but when people had something to say through semantic visualization. Certain experts believe that the ancients did not draw animals merely as a portrayal of their immediate environment. They were often symbolic, like the animals of the fables we like so much, reflecting social relations in an expressive pictorial code.

The plastic representation of horses and lions on stone have to be deciphered and interpreted, just as we interpret the meaning of the famous Madara Horseman, carved on the face of a vertical cliff. In this case the horse, rider, lion, dog, spear and the spacing of the figures tell the tale of the historical and social relations of the period. What we would call in modern language 'information', given in symbolic code, has long intrigued scholars and experts on ancient art. In the art of this period and very much earlier, we often find the figures of horses, riders, lions, etc.

The striking similarity between many of them suggests that they described events which had very much in common. But different postures and attitudes were meant to convey a different message.

Those who might be inclined to attribute the frequent similarity of design to the fact that the untrained artists of these early times found it easier to copy established patterns should not forget the paintings on the walls of the Thracian tomb at Kazanluk, which were evidently the work of an artist of outstanding talent.

This was definitely not a matter of professional limitations. This was an epoch in which the spoken or written language (using the Greek alphabet) and expression through the media of art led a parallel existence. Though pictorial art never became the equivalent of the picture writing of the Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians, it nevertheless stood for certain established values. The well-known authority on Scythian art, Georges Charier, has noted that in the very early period a painting was not so much a means of expressing the sentiments of an artist, as a stenographic code expressing not only what the artist saw, but also the message he wished to convey. Before the creation of an alphabet, he went on to say, script and pictorial writing intermingled until progress separated them in the form in which we know and use script and art today.

These monuments of old Bulgarian art, of which the rock relief of the Madara Horseman is perhaps best known, are definitely associated with historical periods and events. Those who formed part of what was then called the barbarian world and nomads, wanted to show that they had founded a strong and solid state, that they defended it and defeated their enemies in battle – a record to inspire and give heart to the generations to come.

Let us consider Old Bulgarian art from another point of view and then sort out the threads of its development.

The Soviet historian A.Y.Gourevich has noted that man is not born with a 'sense of time'; his notions of time and space are shaped by the stage of development of his cultural environment. Psychologists believe that time and space in literature and art are not directly conditioned on the world view and historical conceptions of the society in which these works have been created, but rather on what writers and artists feel it to be their mission to express. This is just as true today as it was in the development of Bulgarian art and culture during the reign of Boris and Simeon.

Awareness of the realities of life went hand in hand with artistic inspiration, social events with their personal interpretation and evaluation by the artists. Their works give us an idea of the way of life of the people, of the social hierarchy and structure of cultural and spiritual values. We see man as an element of his social group. Interest in the individual and in the vast realm of his philosophy and psychology appeared with the Renaissance through the development of economic contacts between countries in all parts of the world, scientific progress and travelling, which broke the fetters of scholastic thought and the ascetic iconographic representation of man.

We constantly discover elements of real life in these old works of art, reflecting the response of the heart and mind to personalities and events, transcending the limitations of the religious and philosophical dogmas of the period, which centred on psalms glorifying the Almighty, eulogistic Vitae and the images of Saints in icons, gold vessels, marble columns and church friezes.

Chronicles too, besides a record of historical events, reflected the personal interest and motivation of their writers.

It is hard to draw a line between the artistic genres of the period and their historical and social aspect. There is an organic fusion between the emotional impulses of the artists and their attitude to their social environment. Khan Krum's legislation suggests an enlightened and purposeful ruler, strong in victory, believing that his people and nation would stand firm through the ages if guided by the principles of morality, reason and justice.

E.Mahl, the French historian and expert on the medieval period, noted in his book 'Religious Art in France in the 13th Century' that the artists of the period expressed the thoughts and feelings of countless generations and though artists were not forbidden to express their personal inclinations, they were bound by the rules and traditions of 'sacral mathematics'. Outstanding works of art were *sui generis* religious hieroglyphs and artists had to keep their compositions within the bounds of the 'theology of art'.

If this was generally the case in France in the 13th century, we should appreciate all the more the spontaneous outcrop of subjects reproduced from everyday life in the art of the Slav and Bulgarian artists and writers. The efforts of Boris and Simeon to help Bulgaria take her rightful place among the other nations, to assert the equality of its cultural and spiritual development in the Slav-Bulgarian tongue explain why the artists of the period readily swerved from the traditional 'sacral mathematics', and imbued their media of expression with a richer historical content.

The fetters of theology were loosened.

Now the learned books and later progressive apocrypha began to be written in the language spoken by the people. The decorative compositions and ornamental patterns of churches, palaces and public buildings were more meaningful to their contemporaries than they are to us. The notions of poetic fancy and reality were still confused on the border of legend and history. This is evident in the stories of Isaiah's Vision and Commission, the Crucifixion, the story of Adam and Eve and in the numerous *Vitae*. In these historic genres we have an intertwining mixture of truth and poetical invention, reality and myth, events which really took place and hyperbolism suggested by the divine

miracles described in the holy books. These contradictory elements found fertile soil in the credulence of people living in an epoch of stirring historical events and belief in mysteries and ascetic miracles.

This was an epoch in which the Church preached life on earth is but a fleeting shadow and that immortality lay in the world beyond. This blissful world of angels and cherubims, out of the reach of Satan's hand, would give the righteous the blessing of God.

But just then the Bulgarians were creating and developing their earthly culture. Their scholars challenged the trilingual dogma and showed why the Gospel and all other religious books should be read and written not only in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, but also in Bulgarian and all languages of the Slavonic world.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were non-corporeal beings in a 'world without end'. To them the church gradually added their messengers on earth: the biblical prophets, the twelve disciples and a host of Christian martyrs.

But in spite of this very strict church protocol, the Bulgarians immortalized popular religious leaders, writers and scholars, whose lifework helped the Slavonic nations play their part in the cultural development of human society: Cyril and Methodius, Kliment and Naum. The accounts of their lives are far more earthly than heavenly, far more the product of human reason than of sacral abstractions. God is present in the Bulgarian books and sermons of the period, because the entire rational and emotional outlook of the people were imbued with religious fervor. But few confined themselves to the realm of the divine. The sanctification of some of the most eminent writers and scholars and the title of 'saint' had just as much an academic as a theological ring. They were usually high church hierarchs, and at the same time political and cultural leaders of the Slavs and Bulgarians.

Presbyter Cosma defended in his famous Lectionary the divinity of time eternal. He wrathfully denounced the 'heretics attempting to destroy what the Apostles had learned and built with such great effort.' But the people he denounced were those who had an understandable human conception of God and

nature and of the truths and myths which the learned books contained.

The reign of Boris and Simeon was a period of assertion of the Old Slavonic language, which was essentially Old Bulgarian.

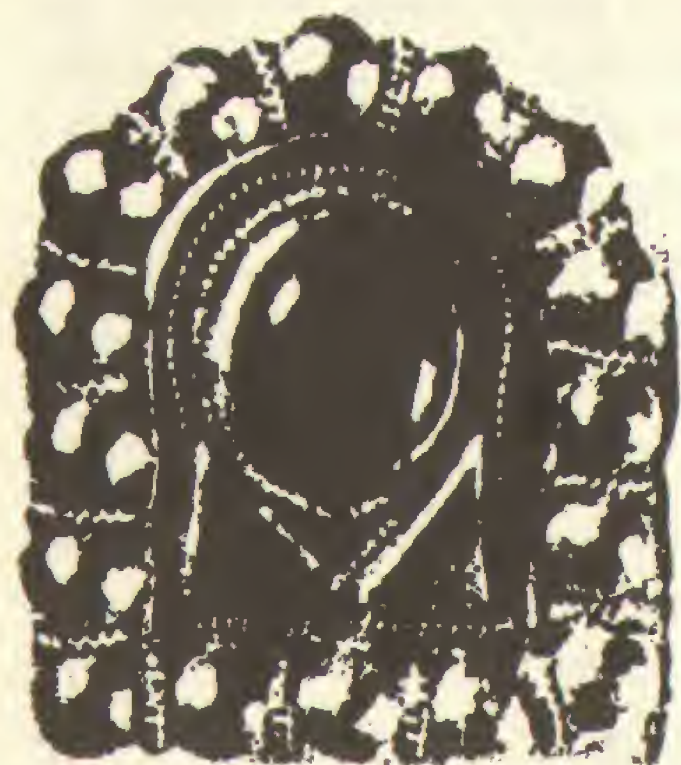
Historians and linguistic experts have long defined the language in which Cyril and Methodius started our literary development. There have been grammars in what their authors have called it Old Church Slavonic language, laying emphasis on its functional role. But many scholars have defined it as Old Bulgarian, because it was the scholastic language of Bulgaria during the reign of Boris and Simeon and because of its dialectical and ethnic structure. It was the language of the Bulgarian Church, writers and scholars, translators, philosophers – of all living in the Bulgarian lands. The fusion creating the Bulgarian people included Thracian elements, a huge mass of tribes of the eastern Slav group and the Old Bulgars led by the Khans Asparuch and Kuber.

A historian has noted that the name Bulgarians was given not only to the north-eastern territories where Asparuch led his group, but also to the southwestern territories where the group led by Khan Kuber finally settled. That is why Professor D. Angelov says that it was the name given to all Slavs within the confines of the realm: in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. Professor Dora Ivanova-Mircheva (linguistics) points out that the language of the works of Yoan the Exarch and Kliment, of the translations and compilations made during this early period, and of the original works, apocrypha and legends, was functionally Old Slavonic, but ethnically Old Bulgarian. This is the old Moesian, old Thracian and old Macedonian language (geographically speaking).

In Moravia the Old Slavonic language was discouraged and suppressed and all written monuments were systematically destroyed. It was then that the Slavonic literary traditions developed widely in Bulgaria during the reign of Boris and Simeon by the foundation of the famous literary schools at Ohrid and Preslav. The language of the two schools was identical, with slight differences in dialect. Professor Dora Ivanova rightly observes that dialectical elements unavoidably creep into a

developing language which is still in the process of enlarging its literary vocabulary and seeking new media of expression.

And so we see that Old Bulgarian was not merely an instrument of communication and the conveyance of information. It was a structural factor which shaped the general Slavonic



philosophy, poetry, history and writing. At this point the interaction between the linguistic and visual elements gave fresh impetus to the cultural development of the young and enterprising nation.

By the universal imposition of Latin, the Catholic hierarchs seem to have intended to instil belief in and resignation to the unchanging nature of the universe – to the preordained domination of the Vatican and of the elect successor of St Peter. The Old Bulgarian language was never constrained by such an edict of stagnation. On the contrary, we have seen how extensively the Old Bulgarian writers and translators theorized to convey the exact meaning of foreign words and conceptions and in this way constantly developed their vernacular. The lack of strictly defined rules of grammar and syntax in the early period was counterbalanced by a thirst for learning and progress, which soon established the form and opened the way for the development of literary and cultural traditions.

Today many experts are studying the problems of rhythm, space and time in the various fields of art. Historians, authorities on art, philosophers, physiologists, physicists, mathematicians

and specialists of other professions are engaged in comprehensive surveys to elucidate all aspects, trends, schools and periods.

In Leningrad B.S.Meilach chairs a commission investigating the way in which art is refracted through the prisms of time, rhythm and spatial dimensions. He believes that these notions constantly change with the evolution of the theory and practice



of art. This is also our problem, when we discuss Bulgarian philosophy, art and historical conceptions from the seventh to the tenth century. Like the magicians in fairy tales, art is never confined to time and space: it may suddenly take a leap back of thousands of years, or outpace an epoch by hundreds to anchor where the artist intends it to be.

We find these same elements of rhythm, powerful thrusts forward and pauses of gathering momentum in Bulgarian writings, poetry, architecture and in the development of art through the ages.

The stone dressers and masons who built Pliska and Preslav achieved grace and rhythm in the organization of architectural space and created a dignified and monumental Bulgarian architectural classicism. It had its distinctive features and differed from what knowledge and experience the Bulgarians had originally brought from the east; it differed from what they

found in their new homeland and what had been built and produced by the civilization of the Byzantine Empire, which had ruled these lands. This was a long period in which time was measured by a chronology listing the sequence of events in Bulgaria from year to year and from one decade or age to another, and by the thrusts of human endeavour appearing in sculpture, literature and the fine and decorative arts – a free development which was not confined to the realm of Greek mythology, biblical legends or folkloric traditions. We seem to discover a similarity with what Igor Stravinsky has said of music – defining the relationship between man and time. Man's feeling of the present is always a fleeting pause between the past and the future.

Our journey, too, is like a great wave rolling from the past towards the future, while we ride on the crest of the present...

EPILOGUE

or the end of the journey through the Old Bulgarian towns, museums and libraries preserving the artistic and literary heritage of the Old Bulgarians

The author of this book has taken his readers round a number of Old Bulgarian towns, museums, libraries and excavation sites, all vestiges of the early life of the Bulgarian people and of their flourishing civilization which have yet to be fully studied and described.

If this journey through the past and present has aroused the interest of readers, it will have accomplished its purpose. It is a journey in which the landmarks of the past point towards new horizons. Every step forward reveals what lies in the shadow of the past and gives rise to new expectations.

After his travels in Europe in 1580, Montaigne said he never set out on a journey with the intent of coming back, or of necessarily ending it. The main thing was to go on, and on...

Every work of art has a specific volume, dimension and value. It may be a creation of stone, painted canvas or sepulchral vault, or in written form.

But true works of art have more than one dimension. Time and the realities of life give it new philosophical and emotional values from one generation to another. People give them differing interpretations and discover elements which their predecessors may have overlooked, just as future generations will inevitably be impressed by other aspects of these creations.

A journey in the past and present, among the museums, books, ancient works of art of a people brings the traveller in touch with objects which will never be repeated. His response to the heritage of the past triggers new trends of thought and creative imagination.

Man's presence, as an artist or a lover of art, is an unending quest for a new experience. We respond to the emotion which the artist has wished to impart, and often discover elements which the artist has portrayed intuitively without actually discerning them. We face works with whose description we have been familiar, and realize that they have to be really seen for a complete understanding of their beauty and meaning.

That is why we have centred on what has become part of the national classic heritage and what is certain to be thought worthy of taking its rightful place among the best esthetic creations of man in his long history.

After we leave the museums and close the old books, we shall at times try to remember certain compositions, colours and strokes of the brush. Descriptions, photographs and reproductions of models of these ancient works of art are undoubtedly helpful, but personal experience is necessary to catch the subtle effects which make them really great.

The quest for beauty, for all that is good and true of the ancients have fertilized our own search of a wiser and better future.

That is why we never tire of our travels through these ancient cities and the ruins of their abandoned homes; we never tire of stopping before the tombstone effigies of people long departed, of seeing and touching with our own hands the works of the old potters and mural painters, because they all leave a lasting emotional impact.

We shall never know who created many of these ancient works of art. There is something intriguing in that, for they are the product of time in man's long and eventful history.

1970-1976

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BOGOMIL NONEV
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE AGES

English translation: PETKO DRENKOV

English editor: IAN WHITE

Artist: DIMITER KARTALEV

Art editor: VIOLETA MOLNOVA

Layout: ROUMYANA BRAYANOVA

Proof reader: ILINA MIRKOVA

Format 84/108/32,8 Printer's sheets

The BALKAN State Publishing House

31 95314 23231
0618-51-80

